



Gods and Humans in Medieval Scandinavia

Retying the Bonds

JONAS WELLENDORF

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GODS AND HUMANS IN MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA

The coming of Christianity to Northern Europe resulted in profound cultural changes. In the course of a few generations, new answers were given to fundamental existential questions and older notions were invalidated. Jonas Wellendorf's study, the first monograph in English on this subject, explores the medieval Scandinavian reception and re-interpretation of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. This original work draws on a range of primary sources ranging from *Prose Edda* and Saxo Grammaticus' *History of the Danes* to less well-known literary works including the *Saga of Barlaam* and the *Hauksbók* manuscript (c. 1300). By providing an in-depth analysis of often overlooked mythological materials, along with translations of all textual passages, Wellendorf delivers an accessible work that sheds new light on the ways in which the old gods were integrated into the Christian worldview of medieval Scandinavia.

JONAS WELLENDOFF is an assistant professor in the Department of Scandinavian at University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of multiple articles in journals and peer-reviewed anthologies and has also co-edited anthologies and an edition of an Old Norse rhetorical treatise.

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JONAS WELLENDORF

University of California, Berkeley



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Allir menn þeir sem sannfróðir eru at um tíðendi, vita at Tyrkir ok Asíamenn byggðu Norðrlond. Hófsk þá tunga sú er síðan dreifðisk um öll lond. Formaðr þess folks hét Óðinn, er menn rekja ætt til.

All men who possess true knowledge about events know that Turks and Asians populated the North. The tongue which later spread across all lands originated then. The chieftain of this people was called Óðinn, and people trace their ancestry to him.

Sturlaugs saga starfsama, FAS vol. III, p. 107

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As a starting point for this book, I will identify an interest in medieval versions of the story of the Babylonian Confusion which led me to the *Codex Wormianus* version of the Edda prologue that I discuss in [Chapter 5](#). I began working on this text while I was a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen. The work on the other chapters, which can be seen as ways of contextualizing the Edda prologue, began after I had taken up my current position at the University of California, Berkeley. There I have not only benefited from the inspiring atmosphere of the Department of Scandinavian, the Program in Medieval Studies, and the university at large, I have also had the immense pleasure of teaching classes on Scandinavian myth and religion at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This has helped me shape my ideas on the topic. I have also benefited greatly from invitations to present my work on mythology at annual conferences on Old Norse mythology. These meetings have been a great inspiration for me and have helped me sustain my interest in the material.

Early versions of most of the chapters or parts of them have been presented at conferences and workshops over the years from 2012 and onwards. An early version of parts of [Chapter 3](#) was published in 2013 as ‘Zoroaster, Saturn, and Óðinn: The Loss of Language and the Rise of Idolatry’ in an anthology entitled *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Uncanonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, edited by Tuomas Lehtonen and Lars Boje Mortensen (Turnhout: Brepols). The material on Jonas Ramus in the Epilogue was published in 2014 as ‘Odin of Many Devices: Jonas Ramus (d. 1718) on the Identity of Odin and Odysseus’ in the anthology *Nordic*

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*Retying the Bonds***Overturning the Old Gods**

The coming of Christianity to Northern Europe around the turn of the first millennium changed medieval northern culture profoundly. New answers were given to fundamental questions regarding the nature of the superhuman forces at work in the world, how one interacts with these forces, and the place of humans in this life and beyond, to name a few. New ideas invalidated older, less stable (and perhaps less firmly conceptualized) notions. Without overemphasizing the differences between the so-called local and world religions, it seems safe to assume with Schjødt 'that Christianity is religion in quite another way than the pagan "religion" was religion' and that, to a higher degree than in Christianity, worldviews before the conversion were relatively organic and changeable.¹ Recent scholarship on Old Norse pre-Christian worldviews has done much to emphasize the variable nature of the pre-Christian cultic practices, in particular over larger geographical areas.² This variance is to a large part explained by the lack of centralized authorities delimiting orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The Christian Church, on the other hand, had an overarching administrative structure, a well-developed and well-conceptualized theology, and strove, if not always successfully, for uniformity.

The dynamic nature of pre-Christian rites, the outlook associated with them, and the reluctance (perhaps the inability) of Christian writers to go into detail about actual cultic practices frustrate attempts to establish in any detail the worldview that dominated the North before the advent of Christianity.³ Adam of Bremen, e.g., one of the key textual sources to tenth- and eleventh-century Scandinavian history, does not deem it worth his while to describe the history of the Scandinavians before their conversion: 'In my opinion, it seems just as useless to explore the deeds of those who did not believe as it is irreverent to disregard the salvation [i.e. conversion] of those who for the first time believed and those through whom they

believed.’⁴ Adam, in consequence, has very little to say about the religion, or as he terms it ‘superstition’, of pre-Christian Scandinavians.⁵ The main exception is found in his famous description of the sacrifices performed at the pagan temple in Uppsala at the eve of conversion. Although he does, at this point, go beyond the topoi that had recurred in Christian writings on pagans and their sanctuaries since Late Antiquity, the reliability of the information he provides has long been debated. It is also clear that he censors parts of his description, thinking it better not to commit to writing the chants accompanying the rites at Uppsala: ‘Furthermore, the incantations customarily chanted in the course of these libations are numerous and appalling, and therefore it is better to leave them unsaid.’⁶ Adam’s account therefore provides tantalizing information that songs or chants could accompany sacrificial rites, but we do not, with the possible exception of the poem that accompanies *Völva þáttur* (see below), have examples of such songs.⁷

Despite such determined reticence on behalf of some of the textual sources, scholars generally agree that the prevailing notions of fundamental categories such as time, fate, and divinity changed radically in the course of Christianization. One example that illustrates the difficulties involved in determining the exact nature of the pre-Christian notions, and at the same time highlights their alterity, is the central concept of divinity. The traditional Scandinavian gods, it seems, were divinities of a very different kind than the God of the Abrahamic religions with which most Westerners today will have some familiarity, and their characteristics differ notably from those of the Abrahamic God. One remarkable difference is that the Norse gods were mortal rather than eternal. They existed in time rather than outside of time, had been born, and were expected to die as well. This is one of the major talking points in Daniel of Winchester’s letter of advice to Boniface (723/4) on how to convert the pagans. While we have few stories about the procreation and childhood of Norse gods – Óðinn’s son Váli is the major example – the mythological sources generally present the gods as linked in various ways by relations of blood, Pórr being the son of Óðinn, Freyja the daughter of Njörðr, etc. Indeed, the mythological ties of kinship are often the major key to understanding Scandinavian mythology as we know it, as in Lindow’s *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods*. A corollary to the mortality of the gods is that they are at the mercy of fate and preordained to die at a certain time. Far from being omnipotent, the gods are subject to powers stronger than themselves. Another example of the gulf that separates the pre-Christian gods from the Christian one is that the criteria for divinity appear to be uncertain and variable in the

former case. Some gods were called upon by humans and considered to have special spheres of influence (such as fertility, war, and poetry), while other gods seem to have had a much more loosely defined sphere of power. They are simply around, waiting for the time to come in which they can fulfill their mythological role. The blind Hǫðr and the silent Viðarr come to mind as examples of such deities, to whom no worship was offered as far as we know but who nevertheless have each their purpose in the grand mythological scheme. To take a final example, there is also the question of divine goodness and justice. The Norse gods as we know them are not consistently perceived as good or just. Rather they are presented as being occasionally opportunistic, selfish, irrational, unjust, and so on; exactly like their human worshippers. In short, judged by Abrahamic standards, the Norse gods are not at all godly. With the coming of Christianity, the very notion of divinity was refashioned in such a way that the old gods were divested of this crucial attribute.

Another perhaps even more drastic refashioning of the Northern world-view was the replacement of polytheism with monotheism or, from the perspective of the preserved Old Norse texts of the Christian Middle Ages, the substitution of *ótrú* 'disbelief' and *skurðgoðavilla* 'the error of idols, idolatry', with *trú* 'belief'.⁸ This substitution resulted in a degradation of the gods that had traditionally been venerated by the Scandinavians. As the gods were deprived of their divine status through the redefinition of the very notion of divinity, the former recipients of worship were reduced to demons usurping the misdirected reverence of the heathen. From this perspective, there was no such thing as a non-Christian god.⁹ The figure of Óðinn illustrates this process of degradation most clearly. The importance of his position in pre-Christian Scandinavian mythology is beyond doubt.¹⁰ In the oldest skaldic poetry, that of Bragi Boddason, traditionally dated to the early ninth century, Óðinn is referred to as the 'father of humankind' (*aldafǫðr*), or alternatively as the 'father of all' (*alfǫðr*).¹¹ Adam of Bremen mentions that a spear-carrying effigy of Wotan (Óðinn) is venerated by the Swedes, along with Thor and Fricco – conventionally identified with Freyr – in the temple at Uppsala. Adam's description makes clear that Wotan is considered a god of war(fare), since he is believed to grant his worshippers bravery against their enemies.¹² Eyvindr Finnsson's *Háleygjatal* hints that Óðinn was a god of the aristocracy and traces the family line of Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson of Hlaðir back to Óðinn. Actual and incontestable traces of an active cult of Óðinn are more difficult to point out in the literary material, but rich onomastic evidence indicates that sanctuaries, fields, groves, islets, hills, etc. were dedicated to Óðinn

all over mainland Scandinavia, although with a concentration near centers of power.¹³ One of the most famous of such theophoric place names connected with Óðinn, and one that clearly points to an active cult of Óðinn at some point in the past, is Odense on the Danish island of Funen (Fyn).¹⁴ With the exception of Adam's testimony concerning the Uppsala cult, which is difficult to assess,¹⁵ all this early evidence may in general be considered sufficiently trustworthy when it comes to determining the importance and centrality of Óðinn in the later part of the pre-Christian period.¹⁶ Later materials point in the same direction, but the reliability of such materials is in many cases disputable. A case in point is the *Prose Edda's* statement that 'Óðinn is highest and oldest of the Æsir. He rules all things.'¹⁷ It is tempting to regard this statement as a later accretion to Óðinn's dossier, designed to turn him into the head of a pantheon in the Roman or Greek style.¹⁸ Alternatively, it can be argued that the process of textualization in itself encouraged a systematic organization of the power relations of the gods, and that Óðinn, who was already considered 'father of all/humankind' by Bragi Boddason, came out as the supreme divine being.¹⁹ But even if the *Prose Edda's* testimony to the importance of Óðinn is discounted, the material briefly summarized here – and additional material could have been produced – still confirms his central position among the gods of the pre-Christian Scandinavians of the late pagan period.

The conversion to Christianity brought an end to Óðinn's pre-eminence. Scripture teaches that 'all the gods of the pagans are demons', and in the course of the process of Christianization Óðinn's role was adjusted accordingly.²⁰ Translated lives of saints amply illustrate how the old gods were demonized in Norway and Iceland. Already the oldest preserved manuscripts of hagiographic sagas provide clear instances of this. In the saga of St. Clemens, the protagonist is said to have characterized Óðinn as 'a fiend and an unclean spirit',²¹ and in the saga of St. Martin of Tours, the saint is tempted by demons coming in a variety of guises but most often in the shapes of the pagan gods Þórr, Óðinn, and Freyja.²² These lives of saints have all been translated from Latin into Old Norse, and the translators (or later revisers of the translations) made sure to acclimatize these texts by replacing the Roman gods mentioned in the Latin originals, such as Mercury, Mars, and Jupiter, with their counterparts among Old Norse gods.²³ The same demonization is at work in the Latin historiographical tradition. Adam of Bremen, to take one example, includes a short miracle tale about how 'one of the priests who used to serve the demons at Uppsala' suddenly lost his sight. In this case, the names of the gods Thor, Wodan, and Fricco, about whom Adam wrote in the previous chapter of

his account, have been left out, and these gods are simply labeled ‘demons’. The sacrificial priest, by the way, was cured by the Virgin Mary when he realized the error of his ways.²⁴ Theodoricus Monachus, to take another example, identifies the old gods with demons when he mentions that Jarl Hákon ‘became the most eager slave of demons once he had a tight grip on the kingdom’.²⁵

The demonization of the pagan gods was not restricted to the hagiographic saints’ lives or ecclesiastical writings in Latin, where a condemnatory attitude to pre-Christian gods after all is expected. Later texts frequently exhibit a similar outlook.²⁶ Thus the stranger who visits Óláfr Tryggvason in the Qgvaldsnes episode of *Flateyjarbók* and calls himself Gestr ‘Guest’ is eventually identified as ‘the enemy of all humankind, the devil himself’ in the guise of Óðinn.²⁷ The late medieval *fornaldarsaga* of Egill the One-Handed retains Óðinn’s role as a central aristocratic figure. However, it locates his reign in the netherworld rather than in the world of the gods and by referring to him as ‘the lord of Darkness’,²⁸ thereby demoting him from the divine summit to the depths of hell. A similar attitude is evidenced by a late fourteenth-century rune-stick from Bryggen, Bergen, which calls Óðinn ‘the greatest of fiends’²⁹ and in many other sources.

The fortunes of Óðinn in these texts illustrate how a set of religious notions was deliberately transformed into its absolute opposite in translated religious literature and Latin historiography and how this in turn influenced more popular conceptions of Óðinn, as reflected in some sagas of kings, a *fornaldarsaga*, and a runic inscription. Parallels to this development are widely attested across cultures, but a particularly striking example is offered by the recasting of traditional inherited deities as demons in Zoroastrian materials from ancient Persia. The Proto-Indo-European word for god appears to have been **deiwós*.³⁰ However, as a consequence of a unique doctrinal development, traditionally associated with the religious reform of Zarathustra, the Avestan reflex of the very same Proto-Indo-European word (*daēva-*) came to mean ‘demon’ rather than ‘god’.³¹ The Avestan development of the Proto-Indo-European god-word thus offers a manifest parallel to the evolution of the perception of Óðinn in Scandinavia, from pre-eminent god to (pre-eminent) demon.

Sweeping religious reform then leads to degradation of former divinities to demons, demonization in its most literal sense. Since such demeaned and disgraced godheads are likely to have held central positions in the worldview of the pre-reform culture, their sudden dethronement must have been accompanied by attempts to resituate dominant cultural practices connected with the old gods within the framework of

the newly adopted worldview, as will be mentioned later in the discussion of the transference of the notion of *ár* and *friðr* from the pagan ideological sphere to a Christian one through the anchoring figure of the royal saint. Demonization is, however, not without drawbacks. Since it entails an utter devaluation of the old ways, it is likely to have been a troublesome process in traditional societies, such as the ancient Scandinavians', where a high value was placed in continuity. Old Scandinavian literature, that of Iceland in particular, exhibits a number of responses to this demonization. Due to the intellectual climate and the circumstances of literary transmission in Iceland, it took almost two centuries before these responses materialized in the written record, but once they did, they provided new narratives and alternative models for explaining the former existence of polytheism in the North, models that did not resort exclusively to demonization.

Responses to Demonization

The present study examines a number of responses elicited by the metamorphosis of gods into demons as expressed in Scandinavian texts from c. 1200 to the early eighteenth century. Although complete coverage is not possible, an effort has been made to select less well-known texts in addition to the high canonical text of the *Prose Edda*. Geographical as well as chronological coverage has also been taken into consideration, and texts originating in what is today Norway and Denmark have therefore been included in addition to texts of Icelandic origin. This approach will highlight both the variety and similarity of the approaches taken to the questions of the nature and origin of the pagan gods across time and space. [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#) will focus on an extended section of polemic against pagan gods in *Barlaams saga* and the *Hauksbók* text *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* 'On the Origin of Disbelief'. Both texts are translations into Old Norse, both belong to the Norwegian part of the Old Norse corpus, and neither has been much studied. The two texts share a number of ideas and features, most notably both present a euhemeristic decadentist model, but they differ radically in their explanations of the origin of the worship of false gods. While *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* presents a demonological explanation, the text from *Barlaams saga* eschews demonology and places all blame on human injudiciousness. Whereas the texts discussed in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#) discuss how disbelief arose, the texts studied in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#) explain how it reached the ancient Scandinavians.

Both are original Scandinavian compositions and belong firmly to the medieval Scandinavian canon. [Chapter 4](#) analyzes Saxo Grammaticus' images of the Scandinavian gods in his monumental *Gesta danorum* and shows how he creates a two-storied model in which the pre-Christian gods are simultaneously rejected and taken for granted. [Chapter 5](#) turns to the *Prose Edda*. The chapter begins with a discussion of scholarship on three interpretative frameworks that have been applied to the *Prose Edda* (euhemerism, demonology, and analogy) and then turns to an analysis of the *Edda* prologue as it is found in *Codex Wormianus*. The discussion will show how this version presents Óðinn as a northern counterpart to Zoroaster and Saturn.

This study's central claim is that the cultural significance of the traditional gods was too great for the carriers and producers of the preserved tradition to allow them to see this tradition degraded to mere demonology or simply forgotten. In the process of conversion, efforts were made to sever the bonds between the Scandinavians and their traditional gods, but the conceptual boundaries set by demonization were too narrow to accommodate the potency inherent in the traditional worldview, and parts of this cultural property therefore had to be salvaged. For this reason, skalds and later writers sought to – and to a large extent were able to – retie their severed bonds to the gods. As a result, the gods were resituated within a Christian worldview and assigned positions that were not exclusively negative. Thus the pre-Christian gods became something more than manifestations of pure evil.

One of the lasting results of this relocation effort is the extraordinary preservation in Scandinavian writings of a pre-Christian mythology in a mythological form. Scandinavian literature, particularly that of medieval Iceland, combined the various models that Christianity had to offer in order to understand the origin of their mythology and the cult of the pagan gods in such a way that they retained or regained as much of their former eminence as practically and doctrinally possible without challenging the priority of the Christian worldview. These reconfigurations of pre-Christian mythology were most powerfully at work in the early thirteenth-century Golden Age of Old Icelandic literature. They were counter-balanced by more theologically oriented writers who pulled in other directions and sought – via explicit comparison and juxtaposition with classical, especially Greek, mythology – to understand the matter at hand more narrowly through the theological pre-conceptions and cognitive tools Christianity offered.

Theologia tripertita: The Three Parts of Theology

At this point, some words are in order concerning the general nature of our knowledge of pre-Christian religion and of the mythological material that has been handed down to us. It has often been observed that the Old Norse textual sources contain a wealth of information about Scandinavian mythology, while they have comparatively little to tell us about the practice of pre-Christian religion and cult. In a discussion of the reasons for the relative paucity of information about pre-Christian cult and ritual in Old Norse literature, Clunies Ross argues that ritual knowledge has to be maintained through action, and hence that ritual knowledge is forgotten when rituals are no longer performed.³² Lack of knowledge then goes a long way in explaining the distinctive mythic bias of the textual sources. One may continue this line of thought and ask how the preserved mythical material relates to the now forgotten pre-Christian rituals. This leads to the contentious issue of the relationship between myth and ritual.³³ The following pages will argue that when it comes to the Norse materials, myth and ritual are not necessarily two sides of the same coin. Rather, they should be considered two separate domains that may well overlap in some cases,³⁴ but one should not expect a consistent and predictable connection between the two domains *a priori*. Indeed, the two domains may very well be completely inconsistent with one another in many cases. After Christianization a third, equally separate sphere developed in addition to the mythic, while the ritual sphere faded into oblivion or morphed into a form that would be inoffensive to the new Christian regime. This third domain is the learned one. This sphere may well be closely tied to the other spheres, but assumptions of fixed, mutual connections between these domains should not be taken as a starting point for further reasoning. The complementary nature of these three domains and their differences can be illustrated through the theory of the 'tripartite theology' known to us first and foremost through the work of the prolific Roman scholar and antiquarian M. Terentius Varro (d. 27 BCE).

The greater part of Varro's literary output has been lost, and most of his works are only known through quotations in the works of other authors.³⁵ One of these lost works is the *Divine Antiquities* (*Antiquitates rerum divinarum*), probably composed shortly before 45 BCE. According to Augustine, to whom we owe most of our knowledge of the *Divine Antiquities*, Varro 'worshipped those same gods [i.e. the pagan gods about whom he wrote]. Indeed he esteemed their worship so highly that, in that same work, he says that he was afraid lest they should perish ... by the neglect of the citizens.'

Varro's aim was thus to rescue the gods from oblivion by 'preserving them in the memory of good men'.³⁶ *Divine Antiquities* took the form of an overview of Roman religious traditions in sixteen books. It was the second part of a longer work that also treated human antiquities.³⁷ Augustine quotes significant parts of *Divine Antiquities*, but since one of his goals is to refute it, circumspection is called for when reading the preserved fragments.³⁸

Augustine's treatment of *Divine Antiquities* shows that Varro operated with three ways of conceiving of the divine, or with a tripartite theology (*theologia tripartita*).³⁹ Theology in this context should not be understood in the Christian sense as referring to the study of the nature of God, but more broadly as discourse about the gods, or as Augustine says: 'accounts given of the gods'.⁴⁰ Varro labeled these three branches of theology the mythical, the physical (i.e. philosophical), and the civic, which encompassed rituals.⁴¹ Applying this threefold division *mutatis mutandis* to the Old Norse context, one may say that the mythical branch lives on in the Eddas and elsewhere. The civic branch was subdued and rendered harmless or suppressed and eventually eradicated in the course of Christianization. The physical branch, lastly, does not appear to have been well developed in the North before Christianization, but one may see the attempts at understanding paganism that are examined in the following chapters as ways of creating, as it were, a physical branch of theology. These points will be examined in more detail on the following pages. Although Augustine's *City of God* was known in some circles in medieval Scandinavia,⁴² the application of this threefold division to the Norse material does not intend to show that the Old Norse knew Varro's work or its Augustinian distillation. The aim is rather to re-examine some well-known (and less well-known) materials using a more appropriate set of conceptual tools than is usually applied to this material. Varro's tripartite theology has been declared 'the most cogent theory of polytheism'.⁴³ It is a particularly convenient tool with which to handle polytheism because Varro himself lived in a pre-Christian world where polytheism was the order of the day. His notions of divinity and religion are therefore not colored by the exclusively monotheist conceptions of divinity and religion that often cloud our own approach to polytheistic materials.⁴⁴

The civic branch of theology (*theologia civilis*), as Varro describes it, is the one that free men in the cities, and priests in particular, should be familiar with.⁴⁵ It includes knowledge about those gods that should be venerated publicly and about the rites and sacrifices for which the individual is responsible.⁴⁶ This is in other words a normative, rather than narrative or theoretical, dimension of theology that deals with practical

knowledge of cult and ritual practices, such as worship, sacrifices, divination, etc. Being connected with cult, it is also a reciprocal sphere in which humans and deities interact in various ways or in which such interaction is sought. In the less centralized Old Norse world, the sacrifices presided over, however unwillingly, by Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri (see the [Epilogue](#)) would fall into this realm of civic theology, as would the cultic celebrations at Uppsala that Adam of Bremen described, the *disablót*,⁴⁷ and all other kinds of large- and small-scale public and private rituals. Because this practical and performed aspect of the tripartite theology was the most manifest and easily discerned dimension, it was particularly targeted by missionaries and later Christianizers who did what they could to eradicate pre-Christian cultic practices. *Heimskringla*'s saga about the missionary king Óláfr Haraldsson, admittedly written long after the conversion, expresses this in clear terms: 'Óláfr considered it of utmost importance to bring an end to paganism and the old customs that he considered incompatible with Christianity.'⁴⁸ A similar preoccupation with the practical side of pre-Christian religion is evident in legal materials, where the oldest written laws explicitly forbid pagan practices.⁴⁹ The same can be observed at a more individual level in the fifth of the so-called conversion verses of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld 'the troublesome poet', who states that he is forced to turn from the traditional cult of the Norse gods to that of Christ because 'that is the policy of Óláfr Tryggvason [< of the king of the people of Sogn], that sacrifices are forbidden'.⁵⁰ Different in some measure is Ari Þorgilsson's narrative in *Íslendingabók* (c. 1122–33) about the decision of the Icelandic general assembly to adopt Christianity in 999/1000. In this account, the learned Ari famously mentions a somewhat unusual transitional arrangement whereby Icelanders were allowed to conduct pagan sacrifices even after the conversion as long as these rituals were not carried out in public.⁵¹ However, this phase did not last for long, and soon even pagan practices carried out in secrecy were forbidden.⁵²

This ban on the most easily identifiable non-Christian cultic practices led in time to a loss of the knowledge of how the rituals were carried out.⁵³ This loss goes a long way toward explaining why the Old Norse written sources provide such sparse reliable information on pagan cult and why the foremost textual sources describing pre-Christian cultic practices of the Northerners are written by non-native outsiders (e.g. Adam of Bremen, Tacitus, and ibn Faḍlān). As contemporaries of the rituals and ceremonies they describe, these foreigners would have been much better positioned to report about them than later writers, even if they were not necessarily eyewitnesses to the ceremonies they describe. However, a consequence

of their non-participatory position as outsiders is that the significance of these practices may have eluded them to some degree.

Old Norse narratives, kings' sagas in particular, have quite a bit to say about pre-Christian cult and cultic practices in Scandinavia, but the accuracy and reliability of much of this information has often been questioned. Their numerous descriptions of the veneration of cultic statues are particularly dubious. More often than not, these descriptions of ritual cultic practices are presented in terms of idolatry and reveal that their narrators rely more on preconceptions derived from imported texts that polemicize against pagan cult than they do on local tradition that has survived a few centuries of Christianity.⁵⁴

While descriptions of the worship of cult figures obviously reflect Christian apologetic models through their presentation as idolatry, there are cases where the authenticity of the descriptions of cultic practices is more difficult to ascertain. One infamous case is found in *Völsa þáttr*. This tale, preserved in the late medieval Icelandic manuscript *Flateyjarbók* (GkS 1005 fol., c. 1387–95), describes the veneration of a horse's male member at some unnamed farm in the Norwegian backlands. The farmer's wife preserves the phallus of a horse that has just died and

entrusts all her faith to it and holds it as her god, leading her husband, children, and the entire household into the same delusion. And by the power of the devil, the male member grows and its strength increases so that it can stand next to the mistress of the house, if she wants that.⁵⁵

This account forms part of a conversion narrative. At its conclusion, St. Óláfr Haraldsson baptizes the household, and the farmer's dog eats the former recipient of veneration. In spite of the obviously apologetic elements of the tale, a series of verses that the members of the pagan household recite over the preserved male member is of particular interest in the context of pre-Christian practices. It is commonly agreed that the recurring refrain in the stanzas, 'May (the) *mǫrnir* receive this sacrifice',⁵⁶ well may be of great age and date back to the pagan period.⁵⁷ Interestingly, (the) *mǫrnir* belong(s) to a religious sphere that appears to be completely detached from known mythological texts, and no myths are preserved that tell us about (the) *mǫrnir*. This, combined with the scarcity of information about cultic practices, makes it virtually impossible to determine even the most basic information about (the) *mǫrnir*. Even the grammatical analysis of the central term *mǫrnir*, written *maurnir* in the manuscript,⁵⁸ is uncertain.⁵⁹ Steinsland and Vogt discuss the most common interpretations and argue that (the) *mǫrnir* should be interpreted as a collective of

giantesses.⁶⁰ In general, the notion of a cult of giant maidens does not tally well with our conceptions of the Norse worldview, since these are derived from the mythological Eddic sources that emphasize the strong antagonism between the *Æsir*, who are on the side of humankind, and their (and hence our) opponents, the giants. This variance or incongruence in turn illustrates the independence of the mythical and the ritual sphere. Notions that may be considered inappropriate within the mythological sphere, such as worship of giantesses (if this is indeed what the *mǫrnir* are),⁶¹ can live a happy life in the cultic sphere. Furthermore, there would have been no real need to be concerned about this disparity, because the two spheres are distinct entities.

Widening the scope even further, Varro's civic branch may be compared to the sphere of ancient Scandinavian religious life, activity, and outlook that is captured by the indigenous Old Norse term *siðr* 'custom, practice'. By applying a qualifying adjective, *siðr* can be differentiated into various *siðir* (pl.). The collocations *forn siðr* 'old custom, paganism', *nýr siðr* 'new custom, Christianity', *heiðinn siðr* 'pagan custom', and *kristinn siðr* 'Christian custom' are all attested in Old Norse texts.⁶² With the coming of Christianity, a *siðaskipti* 'conversion', lit. 'substitution of customs/practices' occurred.⁶³ Using Varro's vocabulary, one may thus say that the civic branch of old theology was replaced by customs and practices sanctioned by the new. This does not mean that all customs were substituted with new ones, for traditional practices that did not offend the sensibilities of the Christianizers could live on in some form or other. In the course of this process, any detailed knowledge of (the) *mǫrnir* appears to have been forgotten, leaving little besides the name and a line of a prayer. A similar argument could be made concerning the mysterious god Lýtir, venerated by Swedish king Eiríkr Ónundarson according to the tale of Haukr hábrók in *Flateyjarbók*,⁶⁴ and perhaps also the female deity Þorgerðr Hǫrgabruðr, who is referred to on a number of occasions,⁶⁵ although she does not belong in any obvious way to the divine families of the mythology or other classes of supernatural beings as these are presented in the Eddas.⁶⁶ The *mǫrnir*, Lýtir, and Þorgerðr Hǫrgabruðr may thus represent traces of the largely lost sphere of cultic (or civic) theology.

Varro's mythical theology is the province of poets. Here, Varro states, one finds much fictitious material that is at odds with the dignity and the nature of the gods. He illustrates this point by mentioning examples of gods who have been born in unusual ways (one god has sprung from the head of another, one from the thigh, and a third from drops of blood) and gods who are portrayed as thieves and adulterers, and in some cases

even enslaved by men. 'In short', Varro writes (as quoted by Augustine), 'in this [branch of] theology all the things are attributed to the gods that can befall not merely a man, but even the most contemptible of men.'⁶⁷ As to the origin of this branch, Varro (as cited by Augustine) claims that much has been invented by poets: 'People are on the whole more inclined to follow the poets than the natural philosophers in their beliefs concerning the genealogy of the gods. Thus, he says, his ancestors – that is the Romans of old – believed in both the sex and the generations of the gods, and were agreed as to their marriages.'⁶⁸ Tradition handed down from the Romans' ancestors thus amalgamates with poetic innovation in the mythical branch. The result of this combination is considered appropriate for popular entertainment. Yet these scandalous stories about gods are at the same time performed in connection with religious festivals, and the gods were believed to take as much pleasure in performances on the stage as in offerings in the temples.

This mythic part of theology was an easy target for Augustine's polemics, since his position is that irreverent depictions of deities are incompatible with divine nature. He finds it ridiculous that the gods at whom crowds laugh in the theaters are the same as those venerated in the temples.⁶⁹ Therefore, the mythic and the cultic theologies are in his eyes irreconcilable. However, since they belong to separate realms, one should expect complementarity rather than compatibility. Some deities appear in both theologies, and features from the one were likely to spill over into the second. Nevertheless, each theology still has its own domain.

The mythic branch of theology was an easy target for polemicists and hence was consistently ridiculed in polemic and apologetic Christian literature,⁷⁰ but Christianizers did not attempt to eradicate it completely. Rather, the apologists saw stories about the atrocious deeds of pagan gods as beneficial to their cause, since they provided them with easy ammunition. Indeed, by frequently referring to outrageous stories of the pagans' gods, apologetic writers may have contributed to the continued interest in and survival of such narratives. For the apologists who, following the classical philosophical tradition, held that a god must be exalted and morally impeccable, nothing was easier than to fulminate against immoral pagan gods who transgressed most social norms that humans were expected to abide by.⁷¹

The Norse parallel to the mythical branch of theology is primarily found in the Eddas and in the mythological skaldic poems. Our most substantial textual sources for 'theology', as it were, would belong to this branch. While there is no evidence for organized mass entertainment in the Old

Norse world at the scale of that found in Roman theaters, audiences might nevertheless have found the mythical materials entertaining. Whereas the theology of the civic sphere was actively eradicated, the mythic theology was tolerated. As seen above, pagan practices were explicitly forbidden, but no texts contain prohibitions against the telling of myths or other discursive materials connected with the pre-Christian gods. It should nevertheless be mentioned that a group of texts telling of encounters between a Christian and a figure from the pagan past does concede that unchecked fascination with stories about the pagan past could be risky.⁷²

The mythological branch of theology is inconstant, although tradition and audience expectations must have been constraining forces. Within certain limits, those who presented mythical tales were free to refashion traditional materials and even to fashion new material about well-known divinities.⁷³ It is likely that audiences would have appreciated and perhaps even expected such variance.⁷⁴ There is no reason to suppose that the conversion to Christianity changed this. This changeability goes a long way toward explaining the complex dynamic character of the central mythological figures that we witness in the corpus of mythological texts as well as versions of myths that are mutually contradictory. However, it should be mentioned that our knowledge of Old Norse mythology, due to the central position of the *Prose Edda* and the organizational efforts of its author, is much more tidy and streamlined than our knowledge of, e.g., Greek mythology. It may be that the transmission and cultivation of such mythic materials in the North was the special preserve of the *goðmálgar* ‘someone who talk about the gods’,⁷⁵ whom De Vries once referred to as ‘myth-mongers’ who ‘had the important merit of preserving and handing down the heathen traditions, but who have not allowed them to pass unaltered through their hands’.⁷⁶ Yet the dynamic view advocated in the present study takes a more positive attitude to the inherent variance of myth than did De Vries.

A good example of this variance is the account of Þórr’s attempt to hook the World Serpent. This, probably the best attested of all Norse myths, is preserved in prose (*Prose Edda*), Eddic meter (*Hymiskviða*), an impressive number of longer and shorter skaldic fragments, and, finally, a number of Viking Age Stone carvings also seem to depict a central scene of the story.⁷⁷ In what is commonly taken to be the oldest version of the myth (that of Bragi Boddason), the World Serpent escapes at the last moment. In Ulfr Uggason’s *Húsdrápa* traditionally dated to 983, and a fragment attributed to the tenth-century(?) poet Gamli Gnævaðarskáld, Þórr is successful in his endeavor and actually kills the world serpent. These two main versions

of the myth are both found in the oldest layer of skaldic verse and are commonly held to stem from the pre-conversion period. It is unknown what prompted the originators of the two main versions to produce these divergent versions, but the variance is particularly interesting because both versions are mentioned in the streamlined and tidied version of the mythological tradition that is presented in the *Prose Edda*. The *Prose Edda*, however, prioritizes the version in which the serpent escapes: 'Þórr threw the hammer after the serpent, and people say that he smote the head of it by the sea bottom. But truth be told, I believe that the World Serpent still lives, and that it lies in the surrounding sea.'⁷⁸ The difference between these two versions becomes less trivial than one might initially think when seen in the light of the grand narrative of Old Norse mythical history as it is found in *Völuspá* and the *Prose Edda*. According to this unified narrative, the World Serpent and Þórr will fight one another in the great battle at the end of times, and both will meet their end. For this master narrative to cohere logically, the organizer of the material has to make sure that the World Serpent has not been killed before the beginning of the great battle. This would explain the *Prose Edda's* prioritization of the version in which the World Serpent survives Þórr's fishing expedition.

One can also find plenty of smaller, perhaps less significant, incongruities. One example is the figure of Kvasir. According to the *Prose Edda*, Kvasir was the wisest of all beings. He traveled widely through the world and shared his wisdom. This annoyed two dwarfs to the degree that they killed him, and the mead of poetry was eventually made out of his blood. Following the logic of the mythical master narrative within which the Kvasir story is given, these events will have taken place in the past. Kvasir therefore cannot be assumed to participate in the mythic present and future, except of course in the post-Ragnarøk future when (some of) the gods are brought back from the dead. Nevertheless, the *Prose Edda* also assigns Kvasir a prominent role in the search for Loki after he has prevented the dead Baldr from returning from Hel – that is in the mythical future.⁷⁹

In the mythical sphere, gods interact first and foremost with other gods and with other classes of mythical beings. Since the gods are primarily concerned with affairs in the mythical world, humans rarely play an important part in this domain, which gives prominence to narrative. Thus the mythic story-world is detached, so to speak, from the everyday world of human beings. This gap between myth and reality may, as Assmann has observed, be partly bridged by anthropomorphization of the gods: 'The structures of the divine world, and the stories about the gods reflect the fundamentals

of human existence, but they serve as models, and not as mirrors. The gods live and die, rule and serve, suffer and enjoy, win and are defeated: they set the norms and forms of human life.⁸⁰ Gods who are neither anthropomorphic nor able or willing to interfere in the human world are unlikely to play important roles in human life and thought.

The mythic sphere of theology is primarily narrative. Even the listings of mythical information that play important parts in Eddic poems such as *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* ultimately spring from narratives. In these cases, the listings often appear to have taken on a life of their own. Although we should not automatically assume that narrative materials underlie all items presented in such lists, this is certainly the opinion of Gylfi/Gangleri in the *Prose Edda* when, upon hearing the long litany of Óðinn's names, he exclaims: 'By my faith, one would need a great deal of learning to be able to give details and explanations of what events have given rise to each of these names.'⁸¹

Since the three branches of theology are independent of one another, the narrative mythic branch can live on after the cultic normative branch has been abolished. Even in the cases where there was a close relationship between myth and ritual and the two spheres may have been largely coterminous, the continued survival of the mythic theology shows that they could be detached from one another and that narratives about pagan gods continued to thrive within a Christian world after the religious system in which they originated had been abolished.⁸²

Varro's third branch of theology, finally, is the physical one. This is the sphere of the philosophers. The Greek word *physis* (φύσις) is roughly equivalent to our 'nature', and this branch was considered as belonging to the natural sciences. The central topic of this branch of theology is the nature of the gods. It deals with questions such as who they are, where they are, in what sense they are, whether they are eternal, whether they interfere in human affairs, and so on. The physical branch of theology is a learned branch, and Varro states that it has aspects which 'the ears can more easily endure inside the walls of a school than outside in the forum'.⁸³ The physical branch is reliant on well-developed philosophical traditions and institutionalized schooling. Consequently there is no clear evidence to suggest that this branch of theology was a distinct and well-developed area of metaphysical speculation among the pre-Christian Scandinavians. This absence does not mean that the pagan Old Norse did not have any myths about, say, the origin of the gods, but what the (fragmentary) record lacks is explicit theorizing and theological reflection about the nature of the gods in a non-mythic mode. Yet, once local learned and literate milieus

began to grow out of the Northern schools in the twelfth century, some would turn their attention to these matters, striving in particular to arrive at a historical understanding of the origin of what they considered idolatry and disbelief in the North. Although the monotheistic Christian outlook of these milieus meant that Óðinn, Þórr, Freyr, etc., could no longer be considered divinities, this branch of theology nevertheless inquired into the question of how the veneration of these characters began and what the origin of the stories told about them was. The classical tradition of physical theology provided useful materials that could help to answer such questions. Because the physical theology of the classical world was highly critical of the mythical theology and parts of the civic theology (the veneration of cult figures in particular), early apologetic writers could adopt and adapt many of the arguments and viewpoints that had originated among pagan philosophers. This tradition filtered down through the early Middle Ages and eventually reached Northern Europe. Although this material was written without taking the Norse deities into consideration, indeed without any knowledge of them whatsoever, it provided useful materials and explanatory models that made it possible for Scandinavians to frame and answer questions concerning the origin of their (pre-Christian) gods and the worship of such gods. It was thus up to the Northerners themselves to clear a place for Northern paganism in what by then had become the mainstream Christian tradition, to create a bond between the two. They did this with the help of the explanatory models made available by the Christian tradition, most prominently the rationalizing form of historicization now known as euhemerism, i.e. the doctrine that the pagan gods were originally outstanding humans who came to be venerated as gods. Euhemerism is not incompatible with demonization, as will be seen in [Chapter 3](#), but a humanistic attitude prevails in most of the texts discussed in the following. Under the euhemeristic model, the pagans gods became characters of human history, and as such, they were thought to have lived at a particular place at a particular time and to have performed particular deeds in our world.

The Bonds

For the title of the present project, the image of the bond has been chosen. This metaphor, which stresses the mutuality of the relationship between gods and humans, is an old one, and it has often been connected with the term 'religion'. Christian as well as pre-Christian practices and the worldviews associated with these practices are often referred to as religions.

Familiar as this term may be, it has long been questioned in the field of religious studies, where it has been argued that our notion of religion originated in modern times and that it in many cases is ill-suited for the study of historical ... well, religions.⁸⁴ Although the term is inherited from Latin *religio*, the Romans did not have a concept of religion similar to ours and hence meant something other by *religio* than we do by religion. The original meaning of Latin *religio* is difficult to pin down, but Rives's rendition 'an obligation with respect to the divine' captures some of the sense of the term, perhaps particularly in connection with customary practices.⁸⁵ The Old Norse vocabulary does not contain a term that can be adequately rendered by English 'religion' either. The most obvious candidate, *trú* or *trúa* f., is best rendered 'faith' or 'belief', and was often used to translate Latin *fides* 'faith, belief'.⁸⁶ But *trú*/*trúa* designates an inner sensibility and has less to do with the outer practices, i.e. rituals, that seem to have played an important role in pre-Christian times (and still do for many people). It has furthermore been argued that the Old Norse verb *trúa* 'believe (in), trust' first acquired religious connotations with the introduction of Christianity.⁸⁷ Because of these semantic difficulties, it has occasionally seemed preferable to scholars studying pre-Christian Scandinavian religious practices to employ the term *siðr* 'custom/practice' discussed above.

Yet in spite of the difficulties that attach to the term 'religion', it is in common use. It also has an etymological advantage in the present context. Latin *religio* (and English 'religion') is often held to be cognate with the Latin verb *religare* 'bind up, fasten',⁸⁸ and a close relationship between *religio* and binding or fastening was perceived already in antiquity. The Epicurean poet Lucretius (d. c. 55 BCE), e.g., claimed that he sought to 'untie the mind from the knots of religions'.⁸⁹ The Christian apologist Lactantius (d. c. 325 CE) employed a similar metaphor in his *Divine Institutes* when he wrote: 'We are confined and bound to God by that chain of piety from which *religio* itself received its name.'⁹⁰ For Lucretius, the bond of *religio* binds the human mind and hinders us in reaching our full potential. For Lactantius, on the other hand, it binds Christians to their God and thus also attaches them more closely to the godhead. The difference between the two usages is the difference between being tied down and linked to something unfathomably greater than oneself.⁹¹ These two quotations, although their valorization of *religio* diverges, share the notion of religion as a bond.

The pre-Christian Old Norse appears to have employed a metaphor comparable to *religio* when they referred to the collective of gods as *bond* 'bonds' and *hopt* 'chains, fetters'. As so often when it comes to pre-Christian

Old Norse tradition, the exact semantic valence of these terms is difficult to capture with precision; it should also be kept in mind that the etymological origin of a term is not necessarily reflected in the later usages of the term. Nevertheless, philological analysis of the terms *bond* and *hopt* and their use may prove illuminating. The most common terms for the collective of the (pre-Christian) gods are *goð* 'gods', *Æsir* 'the Æsir', and *regin* 'the ruling powers'. Etymologically and semantically, these terms highlight the worship of the gods, as well as their rule or sovereignty.⁹² *Bond* and *hopt* also refer to the collective of gods, but they have an altogether different significance. Like *religio*, they are normally understood to connote an act of binding in a very literal sense. They 'are commonly interpreted as references to the divine bonds of *religio* by which the gods were deemed to control the universe and man'.⁹³ *Band* (sg. of *bond*) is best rendered by 'bond' and metaphorically as 'binding agreement', and *hapt* (sg. of *hopt*) by 'bond' or 'chain'.⁹⁴ However, in their plural forms *bond* and *hopt* often refer to the (pre-Christian) gods. These terms 'may', as Lindow observes, 'serve to remind us that the vivid pictures of the individual deities with various personalities given by the mythological texts may not tell the whole story'.⁹⁵ Indeed, the terms *bond* and *hopt* offer a glimpse of a collective of gods that interacts with humans. This interaction indicates that the terms *bond* and *hopt* are more closely associated with the cultic than with the mythical sphere of theology. Given the argument in the previous section, a reading of the mythic narratives and materials found in the Eddas will not throw much light on the question of why the Norse gods could be termed 'bonds' or 'fetters'. To be sure, gods such as Óðinn and Loki are often physically bound in the mythic materials.⁹⁶ Yet it is hardly in such narratives that the terms *bond* and *hopt* for 'gods' find their origin. The cultic dimension is rarely underscored in the mythological Eddic poems of the *Codex Regius*, where the setting (with the exception of *Hávamál*, see below, and *Grímnismál*) is normally the world of gods and giants rather than that of humans. Nor does the mythical theology of the *Prose Edda* pay much attention to the relationship between gods and humans. Although the text occasionally mentions the special areas of competence of the various gods and indicates the ones that are good to invoke under particular circumstances,⁹⁷ its main focus is on the mythology, where the gods interact with one another and their giant or dwarfish enemies in the more lofty mythical spheres rather than on the nexus between god and humans.

The terms *bond* and *hopt*, on the other hand, belong to the ritual sphere of mutual engagement, actual or wished for. The Eddic texts in particular connect such interference to the activities of Óðinn.⁹⁸ His constraining

abilities come to the fore toward the end of the Eddic poem *Hávamál*, where he enumerates eighteen tantalizing spells over which he claims command. The third binds enemies in battle:

148 I know a third [spell] if I am in great need of shackles against my enemies. I dull the edges of my enemies' swords, so that neither their weapons nor their clubs bite.⁹⁹

The binding of enemies should here be taken in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense. Although the spell does not bind enemies physically, it has a negative effect on their weapons. By dulling the bite and softening the blow of the weapons, he hinders, and so figuratively binds, them so that martial success is out of their reach. This may be linked with the notion of the war-fetters, a kind of paralysis or immaterial fetter that might bind a warring man so that he is unable to fight.¹⁰⁰ In a discussion encompassing some of these examples, Dronke states that the 'bonds of *religio*, have here [i.e. in the Norse world] become the bonds of a pursuing fate, personified by the god of war'.¹⁰¹ However, the Indo-European comparative material brought together by West shows that the notion of such immaterial fetters is not restricted to the Norse cultural sphere.¹⁰²

The fourth of Óðinn's spells in *Hávamál* unties rather than binds, but this time it seems that a literal interpretation is called for and that the bonds are material rather than immaterial:

149 I know a fourth [spell]: If men carry bonds onto my flexible limbs, I chant so that I may walk, the shackles spring from my feet, and the fetters from my hands.¹⁰³

Such examples of actual and metaphorical binding and loosing of and by a god link them semantically to terms such as *bond* and *hopt* but it is a source located squarely within the cultic sphere of theology that is the most illuminating in this context of binding. Tacitus, the late first-century Roman historiographer and ethnographer of the Germani, describes in his *Germania* the cultic activities of the Suebian tribe of the Semnones.¹⁰⁴ In a sacred grove, Tacitus writes, the Semnones sacrifice humans at set times, and so great is their reverence for the grove that

no one enters unless bound by a shackle, as an inferior who makes manifest the might of the divine ... On that place their entire superstition is centered, as though from there the tribe has its origin, as though there the god is ruler of all, and the remainder subordinate and submissive.¹⁰⁵

Tacitus analogizes the relationship between the god who owns the grove, or whose presence is particularly felt in that place, and the Semnones to

the relation between master and servant. The Semnones express obedience and subservience to their divine lord by carrying fetters when they enter the grove sacred to their deity.¹⁰⁶ By metonymic transference, the reverence for the god(s) expressed by the human worshippers with the help of the fetters will in the course of time have been shifted to the god(s), and terms such as *bōnd* and *hōpt* came to mean 'gods'.

The use of the term *bōnd* for gods in skaldic poetry also supports the suggestion that this particular term originally belonged to the sphere where divine interference with the world of humans is wished for, that is the cultic sphere. Edith Marold has studied the attestations of the terms *bōnd* and *hōpt* in Old Norse skaldic poetry from the pre-Christian period and shown that the majority of attestations of the term *bōnd* is found in cultic contexts.¹⁰⁷ In these examples, the *bōnd* appear primarily as owners of the land, while a human agent is typically said to carry out their will or attempt to persuade the *bōnd* to fulfill his/her wishes. An example that illustrates this divine-human interaction from a top-down perspective is found in Eyjólfur Dáðaskáld's (in this context) aptly named *Bandadrápa* 'The Drápa of the Bōnd', a poem that was composed on the eve of the conversion in the early eleventh century. In this poem, which has been preserved piecemeal in various kings' sagas, Eyjólfur describes the impressive military achievements of the young Norwegian earl Eiríkr Hákonarson (r. c. 1000–c. 1014): how he defeated a certain Skopti, harried the coast of Gotland, laid waste the land of Valdimarr, etc. The poem is replete with elaborate kennings, and it is held together by a complex cleft refrain, *klofastef*, which Russell Poole has merged as follows:

Dregr land at mun banda
Eirekr und sik geira
veðrmildr ok semr hildi
[gunnbliðr, ok ræðr síðan
jarl goðvörðu hjarli].

Eiríkr draws land under himself at the pleasure of the gods, generous with the storm of spears [(*lit.* 'storm-generous of spears') BATTLE], and contrives warfare, [rejoicing in battle, and the earl rules since then the god-defended land].¹⁰⁸

Eiríkr's success in battle is then connected with the wishes of the gods (*bōnd*); when he is victorious, it is because they will him to be. It is noteworthy that it is the collective of gods that is referred to rather than some individual god and that the independent agency of Hákon is reduced so that his actions are conceived as a fulfillment of the common will of the deities.

Similarly, the characterization of the earl's land or realm as *goðvariðr* 'god-protected', a hapax word, also shows that it enjoys divine protection.¹⁰⁹ The notion that the king brings the will of the supernatural power (or powers) to fruition was among the more widespread ideas of ruler ideology as it was expressed in pre-Christian skaldic poetry. This ideology even survived the conversion and can be found in Christian poetry, where it has been adjusted to the monotheistic worldview of Christianity.¹¹⁰

Human–divine interference in the opposite direction (bottom-up) is illustrated by examples in which humans ask the *bōnd* to drive someone out of a particular area.¹¹¹ The best-known example of this is probably Egill's curse on Eiríkr blóðæx, where he not only calls almost excessively upon the divine collective using an impressive array of god terms (*goð*, *bōnd* and *rōgn*) but also mentions Óðinn, Freyr, Njǫrðr, and an unnamed *landǫss* 'god of the land':

Thus the gods [*goð*] should repay the robbery of my property, may the bonds [*bōnd*] drive the king out of the land, may the Powers [*rōgn*] and Óðinn be angry; Freyr and Njǫrðr, let the king flee the lands, may the god of the land [*landǫss*] grow tired of the enemy of men who damages sanctuaries.¹¹²

The term *bōnd*, then, emphasizes the connection between men and gods in the pre-Christian period. These bonds were torn in the course of conversion, and the former divinities were now reduced to demons. Two centuries after the conversion to Christianity, scholars had begun to retie these severed bonds. The tables had now been turned: Whereas Christians and pagans alike held that God/the gods had made men, the gods were now made men through the process of rationalizing historicization that is known as euhemerism. The following chapters will show various ways in which the medieval Scandinavians, by creating 'physical theology' as it were, breathed life into their former gods and granted them a fresh start.

The Hierarchy of Disbeliefs in Antipagan Polemics

The mythical theology of their pre-Christian religion occupied a central position in the cultural memory of medieval Icelanders. The Icelanders conserved this memory as a monument of the pagan past with some perseverance and in various textual forms, giving expression to this memory in historical, pseudo-historical, fictitious, poetical, polemical, and learned modes. One conspicuous characteristic of some of the key texts is that they avoid explicit condemnation or demonization of characters depicted as living in pre-Christian times. They opt instead for a historicization and relativization that describe even pagan ancestors represented as actively taking part in pagan sacrifices in neutral, or occasionally laudatory, terms. The narrative of Ingólfr, the first settler of Iceland, from *Landnámabók* is a point in case.¹ For inveterate readers of Old Norse texts, it is easy to forget how unusual this comfort with the local pagan past is. Literature produced and circulated elsewhere in medieval Europe at this point in time often shows a strikingly different attitude to the pagan deities and their veneration. Another conspicuous Old Norse example of this absence of condemnation is the common (shorter) version of the prologue to the *Prose Edda* (to be discussed in greater detail in [Chapter 5](#)). This text, which will be referred to as *Prologus*, seeks to explain how the cult of the Æsir rose in the North by tracing the advancement of human error from the fall of man to the time of the legendary Northern past. Despite the fact that the theme is one of degeneration, corruption, and increasing delusion – restoration being nowhere in sight – Anthony Faulkes has, with some justification, characterized, the general attitude of *Prologus* as one of ‘pagan sympathy’.² In a similar vein, Dronke and Dronke have suggested that the author of *Prologus* must have been ‘convinced that the heathen traditions had a positive intellectual value’.³ Yet, *Prologus* and the story of Ingólfr represent only one possible attitude toward the pagan past, and one need not look outside of Iceland or Scandinavia to find texts with a more reproving attitude toward the heathen traditions. Alongside the *Prologus* and *Landnámabók*,

one finds texts that seek to elucidate the origin of error in a much less sympathetic mode. Some of these texts adhere closely to the traditional arguments established already in the earliest apologetic Christian writings against polytheism, pagan gods, and pagan cults. These arguments reverberated throughout the Middle Ages and even well into the early modern period, where they were used to elucidate and explain the religious practices of the newly discovered peoples of the Americas and elsewhere.⁴ An Old Norse example of such an attitude is Nachor's long invective against disbelief in *Barlaams saga*. Nachor has little positive to say about pagans and their gods and traditions. Yet, for all his scorn, he refrains, as do *Prologus* and *Landnámabók*, from applying a demonological perspective, and opts for an explanation that prioritizes human folly, greed, and lust.⁵

The present chapter will first outline the basic doctrine about the phenotypes and etiologies of the cult of false gods as presented in the most comprehensive biblical statement on the matter, the Wisdom of Solomon. It will then turn to Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga*, one of the most elaborate, if often overlooked, reflections of the same doctrine in the Old Norse vernacular. It will be seen that these texts present a model of decadence that consists of three successive stages of increasingly reprobate kinds of disbelief, or a hierarchy of disbeliefs; cosmolatry, idolatry, and zoolatry. This decadentist view was understood as a universally valid model encompassing all kinds of disbelief, including that found in pre-conversion Scandinavia (although Scandinavia is not explicitly mentioned). *Barlaams saga* subtly attempts to fit the Nordic variety of disbelief into this grand scheme. Following the lead of *Barlaams saga*, the last part of this chapter will seek to determine the degree to which medieval readers of Old Norse texts could have found the three-stage model compatible with the representations of Old Norse paganism they had access to in the high medieval Icelandic textual sources.

The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon (*Sapientia Salomonis*, henceforth Wisdom) sits uneasily among the biblical texts. Although ascribed to Solomon, it was probably originally written in Greek in Alexandria by a Hellenized Jew around the beginning of the Common Era.⁶ Some of the oldest and most important manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, such as *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Alexandrinus* (both fourth century) include the text, while Jerome (d. 420), whose translation of the biblical texts became in time the most widely read Latin version, prefaced his translation

of Wisdom with a note declaring that it should not be numbered among the canonical texts. As a pseudepigraphal text, Jerome says, it should not be consulted in order to confirm the authority of the dogmas of the Church, although reading it could prove edifying.⁷ Augustine (d. 430) held Wisdom in much higher regard,⁸ and the prolific bishop of Hippo often found occasion to quote this text. Later in the Middle Ages, Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856), to name one authority, acknowledged the uncanonical status of the text but still found that it warranted detailed commentary.⁹

Wisdom can without great difficulty be divided into separate sections. The last of these (Wis. 11–19) presents seven examples of divine wisdom and justice in the Book of Exodus. By means of a number of antitheses, the author illustrates how God punished the Egyptians and helped the Israelites. Shortly after the beginning of this section of general polemic against the Egyptians, an excursus contains the most detailed and coherent treatment of idolatry in the biblical writings (Wis. 13–15). Here Wisdom initially distinguishes between two kinds of disbelievers: worshippers of the heavenly bodies and the elements (Wis. 13:1–9) and worshippers of idols (Wis. 13:10 to 14:11). Then follows a somewhat detailed discussion of the origin of the worship of idols and its consequences (Wis. 14:12–31), after which the author introduces the third kind of disbeliever: the Egyptians, who not only embraced all the false gods of other gentiles but even began to worship vile animals (Wis. 15:14–19).

These three increasingly perverse (according to Wisdom) categories of disbelief are not given specific designations, but they will in the following be referred to as cosmolatry, idolatry (in a narrow sense), and zoolatry. The practitioners of these kinds of disbelief will similarly be described as cosmolaters, idolaters, and zoolaters. The two former categories of disbelief are presented as common, nearly universal forms, while the third kind of disbelief is associated particularly with the Egyptians. When Wisdom singles out of the Egyptians at this point, it should be seen as a consequence of the text's attitude toward these particular people – in particular if the text was indeed composed in Alexandria – but it should also be noted that biblical, classical, and patristic literature generally abhorred and ridiculed the Egyptians' religion and deities.¹⁰

The cosmolaters are the least reprobate of the three, and Wisdom begins by characterizing them as *vani*, literally 'empty' but perhaps better 'inane' or 'injudicious'. They were unable to infer the existence of the craftsman (God) by contemplating the result of his craft (creation in its entirety). They therefore mistakenly attributed divine status to fire, wind, air, the circle of the stars, the great waters, the sun, and the moon, and they considered

these things to be the governors of the world (Wis. 13:1–2). However, the reprehension directed against the cosmolaters should only be a minor one, for ‘it may be that they err while they search for God and wishing to find him ... Yet, on the other hand, they should not be completely condoned, for if they understood so much that they were capable of understanding the world, how come they did not easily find its Lord?’¹¹ The cosmolaters are in other words on the right track. They have been led astray by inanity rather than wickedness but would have progressed further toward truth had they had tried harder.

If the cosmolaters were injudicious, the second category of disbelievers, the idolaters in a narrow sense, are hapless (*infelices*), for they put all their trust and hope in lifeless things and deify the works of humans (Wis. 13:10). They fashioned images out of lifeless materials and considered these images to be gods. Being disbelievers at second remove, so to speak, they worshipped the creations of creations, rather than the Creator of the creations of creations. Wisdom lists with some loathing the evil deeds such disbelief instigates: idolaters sacrifice their sons in secret rituals and break the bonds of marriage at licentious vigils, they assassinate, plunder, commit perjury, and so on (Wis. 14:23–27). In short, ‘the worship of the abominable idols is the cause, origin and end of all evil’.¹²

Although the first two kinds of disbelief are not explicitly connected with particular groups of peoples, Winston suggests in his detailed commentary to Wisdom that the cosmolaters should be identified with the Stoics,¹³ and Wisdom at one point implies that the second group, the idolaters, consists of the gentiles at large (*nationes*, Sap. 15:15). The third group of disbelievers is particularly identified with the Egyptians and the author directs much scorn and hatred toward them. They are not only foolish, wretched, and arrogant beyond bounds, they are also the enemy and suppressors of the people of the Lord.¹⁴ While they worship as gods all the idols of the gentiles, this does not suffice for them, so they also venerate the most terrible-looking and dreadful animals (Wis. 15:14–19). With his last statement, the author returns to the antitheses that make up this part of Wisdom: because of their erroneous veneration of animals, it was appropriate that they were also destroyed (*exterminati*) by multitudes of animals in the course of the seven plagues.¹⁵

Incorporated into this presentation of the three kinds of disbelief are two complementary explanations of how idolatry first arose and spread (Wis. 14:12–21). A father, we are told, mourned the untimely death of his son, had an image of the son made, and began to honor the image as one honors a god. He then instituted rites and sacrifices for his servants to

perform. With time, the reverence and cult of the image grew stronger and eventually it was made law (Wis. 14:15–16).¹⁶ A second explanation tells how earthly rulers demanded to be worshipped by their subordinates. Many lived far from their rulers, and they began to have images of them made. As a kind of flattery, they honored the images as they did the ruler himself. The magnificent craft of the artists who were capable of fashioning such images with elegance and refinement only increased the multitudes' adoration of the one they represented: 'The crowd drawn to the image because of its splendor, now began to consider him a god whom they earlier had honored as a man' (Wis. 14:16–21).¹⁷ These etiologies of idolatry present a version of euhemerism, but whereas the most original form of euhemerism explains the deification of humans as caused by real gratitude toward benefactors and culture heroes, Wisdom focuses on coercion, false flattery, and the deceptive skills of artisans.¹⁸

Wisdom's exposé of the kinds and etiologies of disbelief circulated widely in the Middle Ages, as already mentioned, and also found its way into the Old Norse vernacular in the partial biblical paraphrase *Stjórn* I:

Three things originally spurred men to venerate and cultivate idols of this kind according the Book of Wisdom. The first was the love and affection of living men for their relatives and friends, as the abovementioned Ninus did towards his father Belus. The second was fear and flattery of those kings who wished to do or perform this [i.e. idolatry]. The third was the skill and good workmanship of those craftsmen who made the images or painted them or carved them so that men desired to see them and look up at them.¹⁹

Stjórn I's elevation of artisans from a subordinate cause to a third cause in its own right is in line with Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*, upon which *Stjórn* I expands.²⁰

Nachor's Speech in Barlaams saga

Wisdom's tripartite division of disbelief remained the basic framework for the understanding of the origin, kinds, and erroneous nature of disbelief throughout Western Europe until the seventeenth century, when it was used by missionaries to describe the various kinds of superstition under which the peoples of the New World toiled.²¹ In the intervening period, the doctrine of Wisdom had been further elaborated and refined in the writings of various apologists and theologians. One of the early writers expanding upon this model was the Christian Greek apologist Aristides of Athens (second century), author of the text known as the *Apology of*

Aristides. In this text, the sequential nature of the development of disbelief is made more explicit than in *Wisdom*, so that instead of presenting three more or less static kinds of disbelief, the text presents a process that leads from belief to zoolatry through increasingly more degenerate kinds of disbelief. Furthermore, the various kinds of disbelief are explicitly associated with various peoples.

Aristides' *Apology* is held to be one of the oldest Christian apologetic writings. For centuries it was considered lost and only known through second-hand references. However, an Armenian fragment of the apology was published in the late nineteenth century, and shortly thereafter a complete Syriac version also came to light. This led to the startling discovery in 1893 that Aristides' apology had survived, incognito as it were, in the West and that, moreover, it was very widespread and well known under another name.²² At some point, the *Apology* of Aristides had been detached from the name of its author and included as a speech in a Greek version of the popular religious novel about Barlaam and Josaphat, which tells how the Christian hermit/sage Barlaam converted the prince Josaphat to Christianity.²³ Subsequently, the Greek novel was translated into Latin and other languages, and in time, it became one of the most commonly read and popular texts in Western Europe.²⁴ Shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century, an elaborate Old Norse version of the text was also composed. The Old Norse text, which is perhaps better characterized as a reworking than as a translation, is commonly known as *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga* or, for short, *Barlaams saga*.

Barlaams saga is believed to date from the mid thirteenth century and survives in fifteen Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts (many now fragmentary). Although it is not commonly read today, even by specialists of Old Norse literature,²⁵ it merits more attention than has been granted to it so far, not least because the very respectable number of textual witnesses – unusual for a text of this genre and length²⁶ – shows that it was held in high regard in the Middle Ages. The legend about Barlaam and Josaphat has an extraordinarily long and fascinating prehistory in that its main storyline ultimately derives from an Indian legend about the Buddha,²⁷ but this will not concern us here. En route from India to Norway and Iceland, the Buddha legend assumed the Christian garb we see in our Old Norse manuscripts of it. Although it is commonly classified among the hagiographic sagas, i.e. the sagas of saints, *Barlaams saga* is best characterized as a Christian novel.

Like many hagiographic sagas that deal with conversion, the centerpiece of *Barlaams saga* is an extended public religious debate. The older sagas

of saints are usually story-driven and focus on events in the life of a saint rather than matters of doctrine. Occasionally, the plain narrative mode is interrupted by doctrinal sections cast in the form of sermons, monologues, or debates, where arguments for the Christian faith or against polytheism or Judaism are presented in, respectively, an apologetic or polemic mode.²⁸ Typically, these doctrinal sections are staged as debates between the saga's saintly protagonist and his main antagonist (or a proxy of the antagonist). Inasmuch as these doctrinal sections can be said to constitute the real *raison d'être* of the genre, one may with Reed characterize these sagas as narrativized polemics or apologetics (depending on the general attitude of the doctrinal sections).²⁹ The earlier sagas of saints share this distinctive trait with the Latin legends from which they derive.

In *Barlaams saga* (and in the textual tradition of which it is a part), this polemic focal point has been configured in a somewhat unorthodox way. Barlaam, the sage protagonist, does not partake in the debate as the defender of Christianity. Rather, the iniquitous pagan King Avennir, Josaphat's father, has misled the crowd witnessing the debate into believing that a disguised pagan magician by the name of Nachor is Barlaam. Meanwhile, the real Barlaam is held captive by the king. With this clever scheme, which has been concocted by Avennir's advisor, the king hopes to discredit Christianity, anticipating that the pagan magician Nachor is unable, and indeed disinclined, to champion Christianity convincingly. Avennir reckons that this inadequate defense will cause his son, Josaphat, and all the other Christian converts to forsake their new faith and revert to the fold of polytheism. However, Almighty God intervenes and makes Nachor preach the Christian faith even though he has no real knowledge of its teachings. When it is time for Barlaam, that is, for the disguised Nachor, to speak, he asks for silence, raises his hands, and begins 'to speak of that matter of which he knew not, just like the donkey of Balaam that immediately knew and had to speak when God wanted it'.³⁰

With three-quarters of the elaborate fourteen-page-long speech devoted to polemics, Nachor's monologue is not so much a defense of Christianity as it is an attack on polytheism and idolatry.³¹ The speech begins by presenting the so-called teleological argument for the existence of God, also known as 'the argument from design'. In *Barlaams saga*, this proof is narrativized as an autobiographical account about personal recognition and realization:

By myself I considered the manifold arrangements of the world ... and when I contemplated all these things with attentiveness, then it seemed to

me that all these things are moved and moved again, turned back and forth, and up and down, that they grow and shrink for that purpose and necessity which they have been put to, and I understood that he who created this is a true God.³²

A version of this well-known and widespread argument, though without the autobiographical element, is presented in *Prologus* to the *Prose Edda*, where humankind is said to have come to this realization at some point after the Deluge but before Abraham. As will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#), the results of the recognition of the argument from design in *Prologus* did not have a great permanence and were perverted through the process of linguistic change. In *Barlaams saga*, the recognition has greater consequences. As Nachor describes the realization, it is made in the immediate past of the narrative present. Given that Nachor is a virtual doppelgänger of Barlaam,³³ that he loses control of his faculty of speech while impersonating Barlaam in the debate, and that the Christian God forces him to defend the Christian faith against his own will, it is conceivable that Nachor's speech is identical with the one Barlaam would have delivered, had he been free to do so. The description of the realization of the argument from design may therefore be seen as Barlaam's autobiographical account, although it is delivered with Nachor as its unwilling mouthpiece.³⁴

Barlaams saga is set in the apostolic period, and this moves the story of the devising of the argument from design from the second age of the world (where it is located in the *Prologus*) to the sixth – but since it is presented as an individual discovery by Nachor/Barlaam, this does not exclude the possibility that others have come to similar conclusions at other times. Nachor/Barlaam describes how he contemplated the manifold arrangements of the world, saw that it was cogent and purposeful, and therefore concluded that a governor must be behind it all and that this governor must be God, who, described mostly in terms of what he is not, is

without beginning or end, immortal, eternal, governing all, in need of nothing, above everything, possessing nothing that might diminish his power. He has no foolishness or carelessness, no wrath, no rashness, no forgetfulness and eternal attentiveness, because everything happens according to his plans. He has need for neither properties nor sacrifices nor anything else that can be seen with a mortal eye, but everybody needs him.³⁵

While humankind in the *Prologus* is unable to derive lasting benefits from this understanding of the Christian god, Nachor/Barlaam employs this precious knowledge as the fundament of the ensuing heresiological section with its fierce polemics against the pagan gods. Because the pagan gods are

foolish and careless, do get angry, are forgetful, inattentive, because things do not always work out according to their plans and because they do need sacrifices, etc., in short, because their properties are the exact opposite of those of the Christian God (as described above) or because they possess an insufficiency of what he possesses, they cannot be real gods.

Nachor/Barlaam continues his long speech by dividing humankind into three kinds of people: polytheists, Jews, and Christians. He rejects the beliefs of the polytheists in some detail before turning to the faith of the Jews and, finally, that of the Christians. The text places the Jews in the middle, between absolute error and orthodoxy, because, as it says later on, they love God but do not consider Jesus Christ the son of God.³⁶ The first and last categories of peoples are defined primarily through their belief systems, while the Jews are also an ethnic group:

<i>villa</i> 'error'		<i>rétt trú</i> 'orthodoxy'
<i>Goðafjónustumenn</i> 'worshippers of idols'	<i>Gyðingar</i> 'Jews'	<i>Kristnir menn</i> 'Christians'

On this general level, then, the speech proceeds from the worse beliefs to the better, or from disbelief to belief, but this gradation should not be considered a series of mandatory steps in the progress from one end of the religious scale to the other. Polytheists who seek to convert to Christianity are expected to bypass the Judaic middle step. The extended section on the errors of the polytheists contains another triad, but this one moves in the opposite direction, from the less reprobate to the most so. This triad is in many respects an elaboration of Wisdom's hierarchy of disbeliefs, but it differs from Wisdom in that it does not aim at drawing up a sharp antithesis between the reprehensible Egyptians and the righteous Jews. Rather, it develops the notion of sequentiality and the point that the various kinds of disbelief can be associated with particular peoples; thus, as will be seen below, the Chaldeans are associated with cosmolatry, the Greeks with idolatry, and the Egyptians with zoolatry.

These three peoples are considered wiser and more knowledgeable than all other polytheists,³⁷ but they erred nevertheless. Given the context in the saga and the Judeo-Christian exclusiveness in religious matters, it should come as no surprise that all polytheists are described as having gone severely astray, but the Chaldeans, treated first, are the least foolish among them. The Greeks are more foolish than the Chaldeans, and the Egyptians, finally, are considered the most foolish of all.

Table 2.1 *Nachor's tripartition of disbelievers*

	Chaldeans	Greeks	Egyptians
Characterization	'These Chaldeans adhere in their faith to a great error and fallacy.'	'Their faith is more foolish than that of the Chaldeans.'	'The people of Egypt are in their error more foolish and more witless than all other people in the world.'
Objects of worship	The elements	Men and women	Mute creatures ³⁸

Nachor claims that 'the beliefs of those who worship gods and believe in them, are of three kinds'.³⁹ This means that it is primarily the recipients of a people's worship that defines their degree of imprudence. Yet, the three peoples only represent examples of the groups of polytheists, and ethnic categories should therefore only be considered to be of secondary importance. The triad has universal validity and encompasses the entire plurality of polytheists, not just the Chaldeans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians. To a medieval Norse reader of *Barlaams saga*, one implication of this would be that pre-Christian Scandinavian polytheism would be expected to fit into one of these categories as well. This point will be treated in greater detail in the concluding section of this chapter.

Of the first kind of idolaters, the Chaldeans, we learn that they 'would not know God and preferred to worship the foremost creations rather than their creator'.⁴⁰ Because of this, they erect idols of heaven, earth, the sea, the sun, the moon, etc. *Barlaams saga's* emphasis on the active and determined rejection of God by the Chaldeans is remarkable and more reprobatable than the partly excusable ignorance that Wisdom (13:6–9, cited above) assigned to the cosmolars. Nachor places the Chaldeans in the category of the impious and unjust people, described by the Apostle Paul, who, although they knew God (albeit through natural rather than scriptural revelation), refused to thank or praise him (Rom. 1:18–23). Because the Chaldeans made an informed choice, they are much worse than the cosmolars of Wisdom who erred while searching for God. The Chaldeans not only reject the worship of the creator in favor of his creation, they also make statues of their false gods and enclose these idols in well-guarded temples without realizing that 'greater power and might is attached to the watcher [i.e. the temple guard] than those who are watched [the idols]'.⁴¹

Barlaams saga appears, as mentioned above, to be a rather free translation from Latin, and as long as the exemplar of a translation is unknown, comparisons between the Old Norse texts and the available Latin texts should only be made with circumspection. It is nevertheless remarkable that the most widespread Latin text of the Barlaam legend makes no mention of an informed choice, stating that 'the Chaldeans, not knowing God, erred following the elements, and began to worship creation rather than its creator'.⁴² Interestingly, this significant difference between the Norse and the Latin texts is accentuated by the *Prologus*, which, like *Barlaams saga*, stresses the deliberate rejection of God by man rather than the acceptable error stressed by Wisdom.⁴³

After this initial description, *Barlaams saga* lists the entities worshipped by the Chaldeans: the air or the sky, earth, water, fire, the blowing of the winds, the sun, the moon, and finally man. Each of these disbeliefs is treated and discarded in separate paragraphs. Earth, to take one example, is deified because the benefits of earth are necessary to sustain man's existence, yet Nachor claims that it suffers gravely from being trampled underfoot by men and all kinds of hideous animals, dug up, thrown around, burned, dried, drenched with rain, soiled with the blood of slain men and animals, etc.⁴⁴ Variations of this argument recur in the following paragraphs: Because the divinities worshipped by the Chaldeans are transient, non-autonomous, and suffer in various ways, i.e. because their properties are irreconcilable with those of the Abrahamic God, who is eternal, autonomous, and impassible, they cannot be true deities. At the end of the section on the errors of the Chaldeans, the text once again refers to their unwillingness, rather than their inability, to recognize God: 'the Chaldeans became excessively entangled in this error and in their false belief. They love, worship, and consider as God rotten and decayed things and perishable idols. They have neither understanding nor will to see and realize that this is not God, but rather the creations of God and things of his own making.'⁴⁵ The parallel Latin text, on the other hand, is much briefer and, once again, makes no mention of their active or informed choice.⁴⁶

After this section on the errors of the Chaldeans, the text turns to the more profound errors of the Greeks. In the course of this section, Nachor provides brief summaries of a number of myths about Saturn, Jupiter, Ganymede, Vulcan, Mercury, Asclepius, Mars, Bacchus, Hercules, Apollo, Diana, Venus, and Adonis.⁴⁷ There are also a few sporadic attempts to connect the pantheon of classical mythology with the Norse gods through *interpretatio*, i.e. the identification of gods with one another across pantheons (this phenomenon is treated in greater detail in [Chapter 3](#)). Jupiter

is explicitly identified with Þórr on three occasions,⁴⁸ and the Muses are referred to as 'norns', *nornir*.⁴⁹ In general, however, it is left to the reader to make further connections between the classical and Norse pantheons on the basis of these initial pointers. Due to the polemical nature of the text, no favorable statements about the Greek gods or their cults can be found, save for the fact that they are not as ludicrous as those of the Egyptians. The Greeks, we learn, practiced a kind of inverted euhemerism deifying humans who lived horrible and hideous lives.⁵⁰ According to Nachor, the Greeks were primarily prompted to hold such immoral persons sacred because this furnished them with excuses for leading immoral lives themselves. The speech stresses and reiterates the point that *mythos* and (mis-guided) *ethos* walk hand in hand for the Greeks throughout the litany of depravities that makes up the section on the Greek gods. The section on Ganymede, the Trojan prince whom Zeus abducted and kept as a lover and cup-bearer on Mt. Olympus, provides an illustration of this: 'and they venerate such a perverted god [Ganymede] so that they may imitate the examples of their gods in their fornication, adultery, and many other kinds of unabashed deeds'.⁵¹ One central difference between the disbelief of the Chaldeans and that of the Greeks, then, is that the Chaldeans primarily worship elements of nature from which they benefit: the earth produces food, the sun heat and light, etc. The Greeks, on the other hand, sanction their own depravities by assigning them to gods. The Greeks in this way perfectly illustrate Wisdom's statement that idolatry is the root of all evil (Wis. 14:27): 'From such error [that of the Greeks] and such like originated among men killing and battles, abductions, great waste laying of lands.'⁵²

Although the Greek variety of disbelief is depicted as deplorable, the nadir is reached with the Egyptians, who have fallen into the worst state of disbelief. They worship mute creatures (goats, calves, hogs, ravens, geese, hawks, owls, falcons, crocodiles, cats, dogs, wolves, monkeys, dragons, and poisonous snakes) and even plants (leek, onions, bramble, and hawthorn). Nachor does not spare his scorn:

What a useless belief and a great falsehood! They saw their gods devoured and destroyed, slaughtered and killed, burned, blackened, and decomposed and still did not understand, ignorant people, that such gods who are unable to help themselves or others lack godliness.⁵³

Although the section on the Egyptians is less elaborate than the previous sections – the speaker apparently thought that the very absurdity of such beliefs obviated the need for a more detailed refutation – it adds a clear

sequential element. At first, the Egyptians venerated a woman and her husband/brother (Isis and Osiris), but then, because they were more foolish than all other peoples, they turned to the worship of lower beings. Nachor briefly recapitulates the myth of Isis and Osiris, characterizing the pair as incestuous 'evil-doers' (*óðáðamenn*) who are unable to help even themselves.⁵⁴ The idea seems to be that the Egyptians followed in the footsteps of the Greeks when they worshipped such characters. This in turn somehow gives rise to zoolatry among the Egyptians. Nachor does not explain how this happens, but a widespread account tells that the Olympian gods of the Greeks at one point fled from the monster Typhon (or Typhoeus) and hid in Egypt, assuming the shapes of animals.⁵⁵

The sequential element in Nachor's speech describes the gradual aggravation of error as a process of degeneration initiated by humankind's conscious rejection of the insights of natural theology. Some groups of peoples, represented by the Chaldeans, never descended beyond the first stage of disbelief. Others, exemplified by the Greeks, sank deeper, personifying and deifying their own illegitimate desires. Finally, some, the most unfortunate, plummeted through the previous stages down to the lowest level of polytheism and now worship leeks, crocodiles, and other irrational beings, as do the Egyptians. The objects of worship of each of group differ, but one element that unites them in addition to their erroneous polytheism is the fact that they are all idolaters:

The Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and similarly the Greeks who praised and honored such gods and held such disdainful things as gods, wallowed in great error and disbelief. In their honor, they erected gilded and carved idols, each such that they looked like their gods. Nothing came of their toil, and efforts and expenses were wasted. They bowed in front of and praised those gods who were neither able to perform nor receive any good.⁵⁶

This last point is the standard objection against idolatry that has been repeated time and again since the days of the Old Testament, e.g. in Is. 44:9–20. The most elegant reiteration of this argument in Old Norse literature is perhaps the one found in the story about St. Óláfr and Dala-Guðbrandr;⁵⁷ another will be mentioned below. As the work of human hands, idols can have no independent agency and certainly no divine power. While some apologetic texts elaborate on the demonological aspects of the idols – demons seek out idols and reside in them, and demons are thus the true recipients of the idolaters' veneration (cf. 1 Cor. 10:18–20) – Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga* steers clear of all traces of this demonological aspect, as does the *Prologus* and the rest of the *Prose Edda*, despite

occasional claims to the opposite (to be discussed in [Chapter 5](#)). Rather than demonology, the text presents a humanistic view of the pagan gods.

Barlaam saga emphasizes yet another element common to these (dis)believers, namely their inclination to make stories about their false gods, be they the principal elements of nature, humans, animals, or plants. At no less than three points in his speech,⁵⁸ Nachor stresses that the polytheists make stories, verses, speeches, poems, and songs in honor of their gods, but these are characterized as ‘just stories and nothing more’.⁵⁹ As pointed out in the [previous chapter](#), narrative inventiveness is one of the central elements of mythical theology, and one would therefore expect that stories were made. Yet *Barlaams saga* falls into the category of narrativized Christian polemics, and it is therefore to be expected that invented tales about the gods are characterized with the adjective *hégómligr*, ‘false’, and held to be utterly devoid of merit.

The Applicability of the Hierarchical Model to Norse Materials

The hierarchical model of the diffusion of human error is developed at some length in Nachor’s speech in *Barlaams saga*, where it forms a climax of sorts. Since the model lays claim to universal validity, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of the extent to which this doctrine of the development of paganism correlates with what medieval Norse audiences of this text might have perceived as past Scandinavian reality. Would they have considered the doctrine of the successive and increasingly aggravated stages of human delusion a valid description of the local Scandinavian situation in pre-Christian times? If this is the case, at what point on the scale does Old Norse paganism reside? It will be argued that the three stages of development discernable in *Barlaams saga*, with some modifications, can be paralleled by Old Norse texts that describe beliefs of the pre-Christian period in a narrative-historical mode.

The outstanding example of the *Prose Edda*, which describes the willful forgetting of God and then lays out the first two stages in a sequential order, will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#). Here it should just be mentioned that the *Prologus* passes quickly over the first stage (worship of the major elements of nature) and fuses it with non-revelatory natural theology. As humankind willingly veers from the true faith, they begin to reckon the earth as their mother.⁶⁰ No outright mention of worship of the earth is made, but this negligence can be explained by the general attitude of the *Prologus*, which eschews any direct mention of non-Christian, and indeed Christian, worship.⁶¹ A clear representation of the second stage

(worship of humans) is represented in the following parts of the *Prose Edda* (*Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*), albeit with an unusual euhemeristic twist partly informed by typological modes of thinking.⁶² The *Hauksbók* text *Um þat hversu ótrú hófsk*, which also clearly lays out the first two steps, will be discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

Aside from the *Prose Edda* and *Um þat hversu ótrú hófsk*, where can one find instances of the three stages of polytheism in the textual materials of the North? The first stage is perhaps the most difficult to identify, since nature worship does not figure prominently in Norse literature. There are some reports from classical antiquity about worship of (the elements of) nature among the ancient Germani, but these reports would not have been available to Old Norse readers.⁶³

Archaeological evidence suggests that solar veneration was widespread in the Scandinavian Bronze Age, but evidence for the sun's continued religious significance disappears around the middle of the first millennium of the Common Era,⁶⁴ well before the earliest Old Norse textual sources, and the preserved Old Norse literature rarely alludes to notions of a divine status of the sun.⁶⁵ In Eddic and skaldic poetry, the sun is referred to as a deity on a few occasions,⁶⁶ such as the reference in *Grímnismál* to the sun as 'a shining god' and 'a bright-faced god',⁶⁷ and *Skáldskaparmál* cites in its section on solar kennings a stanza by the eleventh-century Skúli Þorsteinsson (a grandson of Egill Skallagrímsson) in which the sun is referred to as a goddess (*gyðja*) and characterized as 'divinely mild' (*guðblið*).⁶⁸ These examples, which do not mention the veneration of the sun as such, make up the best textual evidence for solar cult in Scandinavia in the centuries preceding the conversion. In a discussion of solar cult, Jón Hnefíll Aðalsteinsson has sought to supplement this material with information drawn from other sources (Indo-European mythology, Norwegian folklore, and Saami mythology),⁶⁹ but not even with the help of this wider material is he able to argue convincingly for the existence of solar cult in pre-Christian Iceland. Evidence for worship of the moon, earth, fire, and other elements of the cosmos is even thinner.⁷⁰ Norse audiences are then, as far as we can tell, unlikely to have encountered accounts of the veneration of the sun or other kinds of cults of the elements in texts and narratives dealing with the Northern past. An Old Norse reader determined to fit this general lack of textual evidence into the grand scheme of *Barlaams saga* could conclude on this basis that pre-Christian Scandinavians had moved beyond this first, most archaic kind of elemental cult.

Yet the forces of nature are closely related to the elements, and there are some indications that they are linked with giants, who in many cases

appear to be personifications of the elements and the forces of nature or at least able to exercise control over them, especially the hibernal ones. An example that hints at a kind of deified or personified worship of winter can be found in the material about the legendary ancestors of the earls of Orkney. One of the texts that describe the ancestors of the Orcadian earls, *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*, recounts how a certain Þorri was the subject of cult, namely Þorrablót ‘Þorri’s sacrifice’.⁷¹ This Þorri, being the son of Snær ‘Snow’, son of Frosti ‘Frost’, son of Kári ‘The Northern Wind’, who along with his brothers Ægir ‘Sea’ and Logi ‘Flame’ was the son of Fornjótr, seems, along with his forebears, to be a personified representation the forces of nature.⁷² Although these characters are not explicitly said to be giants, they are usually understood to be such.⁷³

According to *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*, the Þorrablót was instituted long ago in the primordial past before Norway was settled. This chronological placement agrees well with the model of *Barlaams saga*. Although the reference to Þorrablót is quite brief and primarily has the character of a curiosity – the sacrifices to Þorri were made in order to procure snow, which the worshippers of Þorri considered ‘their kind of prosperity’⁷⁴ – it accords well with other references in Norse texts to giants that exercise control over the destructive forces of nature or are closely associated with them through personification.⁷⁵ Giants were thought of as ancient creatures, older than the gods, that inhabited Scandinavia in the days of old. In the Old Norse present, when texts were being written, copied, and read, giants would still be thought of as being around, although they had receded to the remote parts and now inhabited the wilderness.⁷⁶ The primordial setting of giants such as those of the origin myth of *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk* agrees reasonably well with *Barlaams saga*’s claim that veneration of the elements of cosmos is the most ancient of the disbeliefs.

It is, by contrast, much easier to find examples of the second stage of polytheism, the worship of deified humans, i.e. euhemerism, in our texts. This can be described in a rather neutral and matter-of-fact way as when *Ynglinga saga* simply states as facts that the Swedish kings Njǫrðr and Freyr were worshipped as gods.⁷⁷ But Old Norse texts that describe worship of humans in the form of idols often have an element of mockery to them, something that befits the characterization given in *Barlaams saga* of this stage as *fólkskari* ‘more foolish’ than the previous stage. The *Great Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason* provides some perhaps less well-known examples of this. In one of them, King Óláfr has seized an idol of Freyr, whom the people of Þrándheimr worship. At an assembly where all the Þrændir are gathered, Óláfr quizzes, humiliates, and, finally, dismembers the idol:

Then he [Óláfr] took a great axe. He then moved closer to Freyr and spoke to him: 'I will now put you to a test, Freyr. If you can speak, then answer me.' But Freyr did not answer. The king said: 'If you are unable or unwilling to answer me, Freyr, then he who dwells in you, and who has dwelled in you for a long time, should answer. But if neither of you nor the demon is capable of responding, then it seems to me that the true God ... has forced the two of you out. For that reason, I will by his mercy and my own might destroy and demolish, shatter and forcibly smash all your power'. Still, Freyr did not answer. The king spoke again: 'I am talking to you, Freyr, if you have the ability to strengthen or help people, now help yourself ...'. Then the king raised his axe, and hewed the arm of Freyr, but Freyr did not move. The king gave one blow after the other until he had dismembered the idol completely.⁷⁸

This account forms a part of the description of the missionary king's efforts to convert the Norwegians to Christianity. It is this confrontational context that has led to the emphasis on the demonological understanding of pre-Christian religion. A demon, we read, has taken up residence in the idol and feeds on the veneration offered to the lifeless image of the pagan god. Having witnessed the rough treatment of their idol, the Þreondir willingly accept the Christian faith. This idol of Freyr has an unusual origin: although we are not given the entire migration myth (see [Chapter 5](#)), we do learn that Freyr was no real divinity, but a human being who lived long ago and was king of the Swedes. When he died, none of his subjects volunteered to follow him into the grave. According to Swedish custom, the king needed company in the mound, so the Swedes found a pragmatic solution. They fashioned two wooden effigies and had them buried along with the king. Much later, the two 'men of wood' (*trémenn*) were dug up again by grave robbers and subsequently venerated as cultic images of Freyr – one in Sweden itself and the other in Þrándheimr.⁷⁹ Although this story contains clear elements of mockery, idol parody, and demonology, it provides one clear example of many of the veneration of cultic statues held to be representations of humans who once walked the earth.⁸⁰ *Barlaams saga*'s second, euhemeristic, stage of disbelief is thus amply attested in the Norse material.

The descriptions of the third, zoolatric, stage of disbelief often verge on comedy. A good number of such accounts can be found, although they are not as numerous as the descriptions of worship of deified humans. The process of identifying individual accounts of zoolatry is complicated by the fact that the worshipped animal, in many cases, is perceived as an emanation or a metonymic representation of a deity rather than a deity in itself. An illustration of this can be found in *Vatnsdæla saga*'s account of

a certain Faxi-Brandr who is rumored to worship a horse by the name of Faxi 'mane'.⁸¹ However, the full name of the horse, Freyfaxi, makes clear that the object of Brandr's worship is the deity Freyr rather than the horse itself, which is consecrated to Freyr,⁸² or perhaps an instantiation of the god. The status of the ithyphallic worship described in *Volsa þáttur* (see [Chapter 1](#)) is even more difficult to ascertain in that the horse phallus may, with Ström, be considered a hypostasis of Freyr, while other interpretations are equally possible.⁸³

Clearer cases of the third stage of disbelief are provided by stories of cow worship.⁸⁴ Unlike horses, cows do not appear to be closely associated with any particular deity,⁸⁵ but like horses, they were culturally important to the ancient Scandinavians.⁸⁶ In *Ragnars saga*, the Swedish king Eysteinn beli, whose nickname means 'the bellower', refers to a certain cow as 'our god',⁸⁷ and makes sacrifices to it:

The Swedes worshipped a certain cow greatly and they called it Sibilja. It was so bewitched that men were unable to endure its bellowing. Therefore the king was in the habit of placing this very cow at the front of the battle formation when a hostile army was expected.⁸⁸

Later in the same saga, the Danish king Ívarr beinlausi neutralizes this formidable cow by crushing it with his weight as he is thrown upon it.⁸⁹ A more peaceful example of cow worship is represented by the Norwegian petty king Qgvaldr, who worshiped a certain cow and took it on all his travels and never drank anything but milk from that cow. After Qgvaldr's death, king and cow were buried in adjacent mounds.⁹⁰ As a final example, one might mention *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*. This anecdote, also found in *Flateyjarbók*, tells how the protagonist Þorsteinn received his nickname 'oxleg' by tearing the leg of a certain mighty ox to which Hárekr at Reina in Þroendalög, a landed man of the king, made secret sacrifices.⁹¹

This selection of examples then shows that *Barlaams saga's* model of the development of disbelief partly correlates with the information on pre-Christian religion that the Icelanders of the high Middle Ages would have been able to find confirmed in their literature. Medieval Icelanders could find the three kinds of disbelief attested, albeit to varying degrees, but there are, when compared to Nachor's speech, notable differences in the general attitude toward these forms of belief and their valorization. Idolatry proper is found in accounts of the remote as well as the more recent pre-Christian past. When found in the context of conversion narratives, which is often the case, the texts assume a hostile attitude with elements of demonology. But outside of such accounts, texts do

not generally polemicize overtly against idolatry. The worship of animals, which was much scorned and ridiculed by Nachor, is presented in a less valorized language, although it is hard to escape the feeling that at least some of the accounts of cow worship are meant to be humorous. What is more surprising is that the texts dealing with the Scandinavian past connect Nachor's least degenerate and most ancient form of disbelief, namely cosmology, with giants (the main example is *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*). One may suppose that this association is a result of the association of giants with primordial antiquity and the idea that they are older than both Æsir and humans.

As a specimen of physical theology that aspires to be an absolute, all-embracing truth that accounts for the entire phenomenon of (belief and) disbelief, Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga* might be felt to be too ambitious. As an explanatory model, it does find room for various kinds of worship described in Old Norse sources, but not all kinds of worship. Cults of beings that are less firmly anchored in the mythical theology, such as *vettir* and *disir*, e.g., find no room in the model. Accounts of worship of features the landscape, which are most commonly associated with pre-Christian Icelanders of the settlement period, are also difficult to situate in the hierarchical model. They are generally described in a purely matter-of-fact way. In such accounts it is occasionally difficult to determine whether it is really an inanimate object of nature that is venerated or the *vettir*/*vettir* residing in the object, but a clear case is provided by *Kristni saga's* account of the Icelander Koðrán's veneration of a being named Áрмаðr living inside a boulder on his property.⁹² Additional, less clear examples are provided by *Landnámabók*, which records a series of instances in which landscape features are worshipped, but where one may suspect that the actual recipients of the veneration were *vettir* inhabiting the features. One Eyvindr Loðinsson 'claimed Flateyjardalr up to the Gunn-stones and made sacrifices to them'.⁹³ The southern neighbor of this settler, a certain Þórir snepill is said to have 'claimed all of Hnjóskadalr up to the mountain Ódeila. He lived at Lundr ["grove"] and made sacrifices to the grove'.⁹⁴ Finally, a certain Þorsteinn rauðnefr in Southern Iceland, who lived at a farm called Fors 'Waterfall', was a great sacrificer and 'made sacrifices to the waterfall and had all leftovers thrown into the waterfall'. On the night of Þorsteinn's death, all his sheep jumped into the waterfall.⁹⁵ Although these three examples do not provide a lot of information, they do show worship of inanimate objects (stones, a grove, and a waterfall) and, significantly, they are all neutrally valorized and placed in the relatively recent past in settlement-age Iceland.

Nachor's model then does not fully cover the kinds of disbelief Old Norse readers would have encountered in texts. Although one could choose to see this as a problem, it must be kept in mind that a generally accepted all-embracing theory on the historical origin of religion has yet to be proposed.⁹⁶ For its intended Norse audience, however, the model presented in *Barlaams saga*, which originated in a period where tradition still to a large extent held sway over observation, benefits from the advantage of having possessed an axiomatic status of supreme authority.

Universalist Aspirations in Hauksbók

Christian writings dating from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages teach that humanity originally possessed true faith. However, humankind erred, and the true faith gave way to idolatry and the veneration of false gods. Numerous texts of various kinds describe this process in apologetic or polemic modes. Other texts seek to elucidate this development in a less biased historical manner, but in spite of such apparent sympathetic attitudes, the process is still generally seen as one of degeneration and decline. The [previous chapter](#) showed how Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga* chronicled the progress of disbelief through three specific stages: cosmolatry, idolatry, and zoolatry. Particular peoples represented each stage, but the general view was that this process was a polygenous one that could be (and was) repeated time and again. The text studied in this chapter, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* 'On the Origin of Disbelief', focuses on the first two stages of disbelief and adheres, unlike Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga*, to a diffusionist and demonological model.

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk, the Old Norse text that deals most explicitly with the theme of the origin of idolatry, is uniquely preserved in the early fourteenth-century manuscript *Hauksbók*.¹ Like *Barlaams saga*, this text is not an original Old Norse composition but a translation and reworking of materials that circulated widely in the medieval world. The exemplar of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is generally held to be Ælfric's (d. c. 1010) Old English sermon *De falsis diis*. As translations from Old English into Old Norse are comparatively rare,² scholarship on the Old Norse text has mainly focused on the important, if methodologically difficult, task of comparing *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* with its supposed Old English exemplar.³ Rather than origin, the two following sections will focus on function, a topic only few studies have dealt with in any detail. Examples of this include Strerath-Bolz, who saw *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* as an 'attempt to forestall concrete forms of idol worship and a threatening relapse into

paganism',⁴ and Lombardi, who has proposed that the text should be seen as a contribution to the case of the Church in the conflict between temporal and ecclesiastical powers in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Iceland.⁵ Strerath-Bolz's reading is based on the assumption that the Old Norse text dates from the period of conversion, i.e. the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. However, the text does not contain any striking linguistic or stylistic archaisms, and although an early date remains a possibility, it can be neither proven nor disproven.⁶ Whatever the date of the original translation, the scribe/editor who, in the early fourteenth century, copied the text onto the sheets of parchment that would eventually become a part of *Hauksbók* is unlikely to have been disquieted by a possible relapse into paganism some 300 years after the introduction of Christianity. It therefore seems likely that he will have copied the text for other reasons. Lombardi's suggestion, on the other hand, is contingent on the supposition that *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is an Icelandic text of the late twelfth century. This assumption is often encountered in the secondary literature,⁷ but there are good reasons not to take it for granted. Although great parts of *Hauksbók* are best characterized as Icelandic, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and a handful of other texts in *Hauksbók* were, as will be discussed in more detail below, clearly written by Norwegian hands.⁸ Hence they are more likely to originate in Norway than in Iceland. Furthermore, it cannot be shown with certainty that *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* was known in Iceland before the single manuscript containing the text wound up in Iceland soon after the death of its owner, Haukr Erlendsson, in 1334.⁹ An analysis of the text that starts out from a twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic political context therefore risks the charge of anachronism.

In the most recent substantial contribution to the scholarship on *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, Ferrari suggests that the text is intended to show the greatness of God as manifested in the history of Salvation and the foolishness of those who deviate from the true faith.¹⁰ Contrary to this claim, the following will argue that the text stresses the deluding powers of demonic forces more than the foolishness of those who have fallen victim to them and that the Old Norse text has toned down the emphasis on the grand scheme of Salvation history found in its sources. But first, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and its teachings will be presented in greater detail.

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk is generally classified as a sermon. This is reasonable given that *De falsis diis*, its Old English exemplar, is a sermon. The first section, 'From Exhortation to Historization', will nevertheless argue that the Old Norse text is better situated among historical than exhortative texts. The grand story of the fall of man, the incarnation

of God the Son, and redemption of man that is laid out in *De falsis diis* has been truncated in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, and the text is content with telling the first part of the story. The predominant mode is likewise historical rather than exhortative, exegetical, or homiletic. The following section, 'Manuscript Context', will elaborate on this point by analyzing in some detail the immediate manuscript context of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. It will be shown how the texts compiled in this particular part of *Hauksbók* add up to an encyclopedic presentation of the world in which *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is intended to present a historical exposition of the origin of the belief in false gods and its consequences. A final section, 'Universal Pagan Gods', will deal with the phenomenon of *interpretatio*, i.e. the identification of gods with one another across pantheons, and show how *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and other texts using the same interpretive strategy lend an air of universality to the gods traditionally venerated by the pagan Scandinavians.

From Exhortation to Historicization

Judged by the standards of Old Norse sermons, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is rather protracted. Running to ten printed pages, it is far longer than any of the homilies and sermons contained in the Norwegian and Icelandic books of homilies, the two main witnesses to homiletic practices in the Norse world. It also exceeds the length of the two other sermons contained in *Hauksbók* by a very good margin.¹¹ Old Norse sermons can generally be divided into two categories: homiletic expositions of shorter textual passages from the Bible on the one hand and exhortative texts aiming at improving the moral standing of their audiences on the other.¹² *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* begins in the mode of the traditional exhortative sermon by addressing an audience and encouraging them to live in accordance with the Christian faith.¹³ On the basis of this opening, one would not hesitate to classify *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* as a sermon, but as the text unfolds, the exhortative mode gradually fades from view, and the historical mode takes the lead. The text presents a demonological explanation for the historical origin of disbelief and recounts a number of episodes from the historical books of the Old Testament. The opening of the text also briefly nods to the promise of salvation for those who live in accordance with the Christian faith,¹⁴ but after that, it does not concern itself with exhortation or presenting a clear moral message. The inclusive use of the pronouns 'we' (*vér*) and 'us' (*oss*) with which the text initially established a community between speaker and audience disappears as well. The conclusion

of the text is another indication that the sermonic mode has been left behind. Instead of the customary praise of God followed by an 'Amen', the text concludes by presenting a very succinct outline of the six ages of the world.¹⁵ Thus it does not seem likely that the *Hauksbók* editor included *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* in the manuscript because of its exhortative or homiletic features. As these aspects are silenced, the historical facets of the text gain importance.¹⁶

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk can be divided into six segments of varying length. The general theme of the historical origin of disbelief and its demonic inspiration is laid out in sections 1 and 2. Sections 3 and 5 illustrate the impotence of the false gods and the omnipotence of the true God through a series of examples drawn from the Old Testament. A brief outline of the ages of the world closes the text.

1. Introduction: The fall and its consequences.
2. Historical section about the origin of the pagan gods.
3. The account of how the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, placed it in the temple of Dagon and were later forced to return it to the Israelites, from 1 Sam. 4–6.
4. A transitory section that connects the story of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant in section 3 with section 5's stories about the Old Testament hero Daniel by means of a reference to the story of the three young men who were cast into an oven, from Dan. 3:1–30.
5. Three stories about Daniel:¹⁷
 - a. Daniel in the lions' den, Dan. 6
 - b. Daniel and Bel, Dan. 14:1–21
 - c. Daniel and the dragon, Dan. 14:22–41.
6. Conclusion.¹⁸

Ælfric of Eynsham's vernacular Old English sermon *De falsis diis* 'On the False Gods' appears, as mentioned above, to be the main source used by the author, and the Norse text follows the structure of Ælfric's text rather closely. Some passages of the Old Norse text can be considered regular translations, while other parts are better characterized as adaptations, where materials have been added and subtracted as well as amplified and condensed. Ælfric's text is in turn based to some extent on the Galician archbishop Martin of Braga's (d. 580) sermon *Pro castigatione rusticorum* 'For the Castigation of the Rustics'.¹⁹ This text, which exerted considerable influence on later writings,²⁰ outlines among other things the rise of idolatry along the same lines as Ælfric's *De falsis diis* and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. It then goes on to describe how Christians are able to overcome the

deceit of the devil. When *Hauksbók* was written, the textual tradition to which *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* thus, through the writings of Ælfric and Martin of Braga, stretched 700 years back in time to the sixth century.²¹ If one compares the three texts, it will be apparent that the thematic and narrative emphases have changed somewhat in the course of the centuries.²² The general outlook and central statements about the rise of idolatry have nevertheless remained remarkably stable in the course of the centuries.

As far as it goes, the Old Norse text presents the same sequence of events as Ælfric's *De falsis diis*. But where *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* concludes after the section presenting three stories derived from the material about the biblical figure Daniel, *De falsis diis* contains two additional sections not found in the Old Norse text. The first is an account of how the idol of Serapis was overthrown in Alexandria, an event that traditionally is dated to 389.²³ The second additional section describes how Gregory the Thaumaturgist permitted a devil to enter a certain idol of Apollo, whereupon the priest who served the temple where this idol was located understood that Gregory's God was more powerful than Apollo. Having come to this conclusion, the pagan priest closed his temple and underwent baptism.²⁴ This pair of post-biblical stories appears to be intended to illustrate two idealized ways of overcoming idolatry and paganism. In the first, it is shown, through sheer force, that the Christian God is stronger than the pagan gods. The second illustrates a subtler method of conversion whereby the actual work of conversion is left to the pagan himself. By contemplating the logical consequences of some event or sequence of events, the pagan understands his error of his own accord.

The Old Norse text contains no obvious lacunae, and no generally accepted explanation for the omission of these two last sections has been proposed so far. However, the fact that these accounts were held to have played out after 'Our Savior Christ came to this world', as Ælfric points out in his introduction to this section,²⁵ may explain the omission. These episodes played out long after the events chronicled in the Old Testament were supposed to have transpired and long after Christianity had begun to dispel disbelief, reopening the road to redemption.²⁶ The rubric to the Old Norse *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* indicates, on the other hand, that the Norse scribe is interested in the rise of idolatry rather than its abolition. So while Ælfric presents episodes from the first and the second half of the grand Christian narrative of humankind's fall and redemption, the Old Norse text focuses on the first half.²⁷

Sections 3–5 of the *Hauksbók* text – the last narrative sections of the Norse text, but the middle part of the English sermon – illustrate the

potency of the biblical God and the impotence of false gods by juxtaposing them. The authorial voice gives explicit expression to this point in the short transitional section 4, placed between the materials derived from 1 Samuel and the materials derived from the Book of Daniel, where the demonological nature of the gods of the pagans is also stressed: 'from this one can see what power those pagan gods had in comparison with Our Lord who rules everything. They were not gods, but cruel devils and deceivers of souls.'²⁸ In the concluding section, the author assures his audience that he and other learned clerics could tell much more about false gods – *lausungargöð*, as they are termed with a hapax word²⁹ – but that 'it is now long and tedious to [recount] how malevolent they were and how they spurred their servants to all that which was evil and unmanly, to murder and manslaughter, to adultery and all kinds of lewdness'.³⁰ The author could thus have continued (as Ælfric indeed does), but he thinks that enough has been said on the matter of idolatry. So having inserted this sentence about the consequences of idolatry, which recalls Wis. 14:27: 'the worship of the abominable idols is the cause, origin and end of all evil',³¹ he closes his exposition with a brief survey of the ages of the world.³² Ælfric's text at this point has a number of lines about the grace of Christ and how his apostles crushed and overthrew idols. The Old Norse text, being focused on the origin rather than defeat of idolatry, leaves this out.

In the context of the present chapter, it is the two first sections of the text, the second in particular, that are of the greatest interest. These sections, which also appear in Ælfric's text as well as in Martin of Braga's *Pro castigatione rusticorum*, deal with themes that reemerge in other texts treated in this volume, including *Prologus* of the *Prose Edda* and Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga*. The text begins by explaining that Adam and Eve were created in order to replenish that part of the kingdom of heaven that had been vacated after the fall of the angels.³³ Had the first human couple only been obedient, this would have happened, but 'the deceitful enemy' counteracted this out of envy and brought about the fall of mankind.³⁴ As the proud angels had been expelled from the kingdom of heaven, Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise because of their disobedience. After this brief exposition about the fall, the audience of the text learns that 'now', that is after the incarnation of Christ, humankind has the ability to reach the blessed state that God originally intended, if only it is obedient and fulfills God's commands.³⁵

This introduction is followed by a historical section dealing explicitly with the theme of the origin of disbelief. Having been expelled from Paradise, humankind increases in sin as it succumbs to the worship of

‘heathen beings’ (*heiðnar vettir*).³⁶ This in turn leads to fornication, mockery, perjury, bribery, and not least murder, exactly as stated in Wis. 14:27. God is angered and decides to purge the earth in the great flood, but he lets the righteous Noah survive along with his family. This drastic measure only postpones the inevitable, for humankind multiplies and errs once again. Having been banned from blissful existence in Paradise, humankind hubristically endeavors to force its way into the kingdom of heaven by building a great tower. God, as the story goes, prevented the completion of the tower by confusing the tongues of the seventy-two builders. They spread throughout the earth, giving rise to the seventy-two languages of humankind.³⁷ Enmity grows among men, and spurred on by the devil, they begin to make their own gods.³⁸

The rest of the second section of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* charts the first two stages of the development of disbelief in general agreement with the doctrine presented by Nachor in *Barlaams saga* (see the [previous chapter](#)) – although the demonological outlook is much more pronounced in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. After the confusion of language, fallen humankind begins, spurred by devilish deceit, to worship the elements of nature (the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, water, and earth). The reasons for humankind’s veneration of these particular elements are similar to those given in Nachor’s speech; namely that humankind is the beneficiary of such blessings as the warmth of the fire, the light of the sun, the growth of the earth, etc.³⁹

Cosmolatry soon gives way to idolatrous euhemerism. Spurred by the devil to the worship of false gods in the form of the elements of nature, humankind strayed even further from the truth and soon began to worship some of their fellow humans after their deaths, namely those men who had been mighty and powerful in this world. The great deeds and powers of such men gave rise to the misapprehension that they would be able to achieve just as much after their deaths as when they were alive. Because of this they were venerated and deified. As examples of humans venerated in this manner, the text mentions Saturn, Jupiter/Jove, Iuna (i.e. Juno), Minerva, Vena (i.e. Venus),⁴⁰ Mars, and Mercury. This information once again recalls the more extensive polemics against pagan gods found in Nachor’s speech in *Barlaams saga*. But whereas the Greeks in Nachor’s speech deified personified representations of their most perverted desires, it is not always clear what motivated the euhemerists of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. The text contains very brief summaries of a number of myths, such as Jupiter’s deposition and banishment of Saturn, Jupiter’s incestuous relationship with his sister Juno and his daughters Minerva and Venus.

This Jupiter, the text continues, was the most powerful of all these gods and the one most venerated by the Scandinavians. Mars, Jupiter's son, was a great warrior and people made sacrifices to him before they went into battle, hoping he would help them in warfare. Mercury, characterized as the most malicious and deceitful individual, excelling in lying and stealing, is said to receive sacrifices at crossroads and on mountaintops, but it is not stated what compensation or reward, if any, his worshippers expect in return. His wife, Vena, was also venerated. She was lecherous and lustful and kept men under her spell. These qualities apparently led to her being considered a goddess.

As the text presents it, some of these gods were thus worshipped because of the benefits that men hoped to receive from them, but far from all. Others were simply venerated because humankind had been deluded by the devil. Adhering to the standard line of argumentation in polemical literature against pagan gods, the text does not characterize these false (human) gods as particularly awe-inspiring or godlike by Abrahamic standards. Jupiter may be the most powerful, but he is libidinous and incestuous and so on. The main point of this section is that worship of such gods is of no avail: the devil had deceived the heathens to such an extent that they held as gods depraved men and lecherous women who did nothing save the will of the devil himself.⁴¹

Contrary to Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga*, the primary cause of idolatry is not attributed to humans. Rather than willingly deifying and venerating certain extraordinary individuals after their deaths, humankind is, in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, led into error by the devil. According to the model of culpability underlying the text, their error is therefore condonable and redeemable.⁴² On the other hand, humankind has been led into such error that God no longer pays any attention to them.⁴³ The remaining parts of the text show this in more detail by presenting the consequences of this divine disregard.

Spurred by the devil, the worship of the false gods takes on more concrete forms as both idols (*mannlíkun*) and temples (*hof*) to house them are made. The text now launches into a fairly conventional idol parody.⁴⁴ Having been misled into venerating mere humans as gods, the unfortunate make representations of their false gods out of whatever kind of material they have at their disposal (gold, silver, stone, and trees). Echoing Wisdom (13:10–19), *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* explains that as long as the heathens were in the process of fashioning their gods (i.e. the idols), they treated them with contempt, but as soon as the work was completed, everyone, even their own makers, feared them.⁴⁵ Some also make images with great

skill and sell them for a high or low price. They placed their own creations in special buildings (*hof*) and entreated them for help. devils flew into the idols and spoke to humans from there, misleading them so that their souls ended up in hell.

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk clearly attributes greater importance to demoniac interventions in human worship than Nachor does in *Barlaams saga*. The devil is to blame for the expulsion from Eden and the rise of disbelief. The general attitude toward the pagan gods may be said to be more critical than in Nachor's speech. Where Nachor merely saw the pagan gods as powerless, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* imbues them with the demonic: 'Then the devils who had already deceived them saw the beautiful idols and flew into them and spoke thence to the poor men and idolators and taught them such thing that brought their souls and themselves to hell.'⁴⁶

Having thus outlined the story of the origin of the worship of false gods, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* presents a series of biblical accounts illustrating the impotence of false gods in the following sections (3–5). This leads to the conclusion, where the doctrine of the ages of the world is briefly outlined. The very last sentence tells us that no man could enter heaven before the sixth age, when 'the Holy Christ let himself be born in this world by the holy Mary and freed all humankind from the torments of hell when he underwent torment and death on the Holy Cross'.⁴⁷

Manuscript Context

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk is, as mentioned, preserved only in *Hauksbók*.⁴⁸ This manuscript is now divided into three parts, each carrying its own shelf mark (AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, and AM 675 4to). The manuscript is named after its first owner Haukr Erlendsson (c. 1264–1334), who compiled and wrote great parts of the codex.⁴⁹ Haukr was probably born in Iceland in comfortable circumstances. In 1294, when he was around thirty years old, he entered the office of lawman of the southern and eastern jurisdictions of Iceland. He soon relocated to Norway, where he spent the greater part of the last thirty years of his life, holding the office of lawman for some time, first in Oslo (attested for November 1302) in the east and soon thereafter in Western Norway (first attested December 1303). By 1304, he had been knighted, and by 1306, he held a seat in the council of the Norwegian king, Hákon háleggr Magnússon (r. 1299–1319).⁵⁰ Haukr's rise to the very top of medieval Norwegian society was an unusual, although probably not a singular, feat for an Icelander of the early fourteenth century.

The version of *Landnámabók* found in *Hauksbók*, written in Haukr's own hand, traces his ancestry back to the settlement period by no less than seven different lines,⁵¹ and in a now-lost part of *Hauksbók*, he outlined his own descent from Adam through seventy-seven generations, including notables such as Japhet, Jupiter, Óðinn, Haraldr hilditǫnn, and Helgi inn magri.⁵² Haukr's father was Erlendr Ólafsson sterki, but curiously neither *Hauksbók* nor any other known source provides any information about Óláfr, Haukr's paternal grandfather. This nebulous part of Haukr's ancestry, which stands in stark contrast to the other branches of his genealogy, induced Munch, in a now classic study, to suggest that Erlendr Ólafsson might have been a parvenu and possibly of Norwegian origin.⁵³ However that may be, Haukr's father Erlendr played an important role in the political life of Iceland in his day, being both knighted and a lawman of Iceland.⁵⁴ Once Haukr was established in Norway, he was sent on missions to Iceland, and his presence in Iceland is attested by Icelandic annals for the years 1306–8 and again in 1331. On both occasions, the annals highlight controversial issues of tax and taxation.⁵⁵ It would therefore seem that Haukr was a highly trusted emissary of the Norwegian king and that the king sought to take advantage of Haukr's knowledge of Icelandic conditions and, presumably, also his ties with many important Icelandic families. The historical record is silent on Haukr's activities between 1323 and 1329, and scholars have speculated that he may have spent these years in Iceland.⁵⁶

Haukr thus rose to the upper tier of medieval Norwegian society. In recent years, scholars have endeavored to connect Haukr's remarkable career and his ascent to the royal council with the compilation of *Hauksbók*. An important foundation for these efforts is Stefán Karlsson's generally accepted theory on the genesis of *Hauksbók*.⁵⁷ By comparing minutiae of Haukr's changing scribal *ductus* in *Hauksbók* with two preserved and dated legal documents also penned by Haukr, the first written in Oslo in 1302 (*DNI*, 93) and the second in Bergen in 1310 (*DNI* II, 103), Stefán Karlsson was able to assign sections of *Hauksbók* to three periods:

1. text written before or around 1302
2. text written between 1302 and 1310
3. text written around or after 1310.⁵⁸

Stefán Karlsson assigned only one side of a single folio (34r of AM 544 4to) to the first period. This folio contains what appears to be the last part of an Old Norse prose rendition of Marbod of Rennes's widespread poetic lapidary *Liber lapidum*, 'The Book of Stones'.⁵⁹

To the second period, Stefán Karlsson assigned the greater part of the manuscript; namely AM 371 4to in its entirety, and the parts of AM 544 4to fols. 22r–59v and fols. 69r–107v that were penned by Haukr himself.⁶⁰ The texts on these folios are primarily, but not exclusively, narrative and many of them, such as *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga*, are distinctly Icelandic. Parts of the text of the folios that Stefán Karlsson assigned to the second period are written by other Icelandic hands. The names of these scribes are unknown, but they are usually referred to as ‘Haukr’s Icelandic secretaries’. The decidedly Icelandic character of the material and the scribal hands makes it reasonable to surmise, as Stefán Karlsson did, that Haukr collected the material contained on these folios and entered it/had it entered in his book while he was in Iceland between 1306 and 1308.⁶¹ This leaves the materials on fols. 60–68 of AM 544 4to to the third period. They are of a theological/philosophical nature and have been translated from Latin.⁶²

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, following up on a suggestion by Helgi Þorláksson, has argued that personal political ambition was the main motivation for Haukr’s compilatory efforts.⁶³ Haukr’s familial ties, so carefully outlined and documented in *Hauksbók*, and the cultural capital represented by the accumulated texts would then have functioned as important ‘evidence of his qualifications’.⁶⁴ Once Haukr’s position in Norway was secured, Ashman Rowe argues further, the book had served its main purpose, and Haukr therefore lost interest in the project and stopped adding new materials to *Hauksbók*.

While there is no apparent reason to doubt that Haukr was both ambitious and successful, Ashman Rowe’s argument does not square entirely with the generally accepted course of *Hauksbók*’s development and Haukr’s career as it has been outlined above. If Stefán Karlsson’s model of the development of the compilation is accepted, the bulk of the codex was written between 1306 and 1308, at a point in time when, as far as we can see, Haukr’s position in Norway was already well established. When Haukr went to Iceland in 1306, it was as a trusted emissary of the Norwegian king. At this point in time, he had already held the office of lawman for some years, he had been knighted, and he held a seat in the royal council. The bulk of the Icelandic material was therefore compiled at a point in time when Haukr had already made his way to the top.⁶⁵

Gunnar Harðarson’s more general suggestion that *Hauksbók* is best seen as ‘une manifestation de la culture littéraire des magistrats au service de l’État’ therefore seems much more persuasive, although the specifically

Icelandic outlook of much of the material included in *Hauksbók* probably gave Haukr's *culture littéraire* a particular Icelandic slant when compared to that of the other members of the cultural elite of early fourteenth-century Bergen.⁶⁶ Thinking of the codex in this way also allows for much greater flexibility when it comes to Haukr's aims and purposes with *Hauksbók*. The manuscript is probably the product of a protracted period of compilation (at least eight years, if Stefán Karlsson's conclusions are accepted). It is therefore possible, even likely, that Haukr's aims changed over the years. *Hauksbók* does not contain a general prologue with statements about the aims, methods, and sources of the compilation, but the very look of *Hauksbók*, in particular the low-quality, irregularly shaped, and damaged folios which have been used in *Hauksbók*, shows that it was not meant to be a display manuscript and that the contents of the codex were probably more important than the mere possession of it.

The main body of *Hauksbók* contains material that can be described as predominantly Icelandic and predominantly narrative. Other sections comprise a kind of learning that, seen in a European context, is of a more mainstream and encyclopedic nature. This holds true in particular for AM 544 4to fols. 1–18, the part of the manuscript in which one finds *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. The genesis of this part of the manuscript is unlike that of the main body of *Hauksbók*.⁶⁷ It does not stand out merely in terms of traditional encyclopedic contents, orthography and penmanship reveal that Norwegian rather than Icelandic scribes were responsible for copying the texts contained in these folios. Two Norwegian hands have been at work. The first scribe wrote 'the first Norwegian section' (fols. 1–14), and the second 'the second Norwegian section' (fols. 15–18).⁶⁸

The status of these Norwegian sections within the manuscript as a whole is difficult to determine. It is uncertain whether they were written under the supervision or on the orders of Haukr Erlendsson or whether they were acquired as a unity and subsequently inserted into what later became *Hauksbók*. Parts of the material in these folios are of Icelandic origin, and this combination of Norwegian scribes and Icelandic material does point toward a transatlantic milieu, like the one in which Haukr must be assumed to have been active. The religious, even theological, nature of some of the texts on the other hand evokes the image of a religious institution rather than the secular court. Although it remains unclear how, why, and precisely when these sections were included in *Hauksbók*, they appear to have been a part of the manuscript when it wound up in Iceland shortly after Haukr's death in 1334.⁶⁹

The parchment of the second Norwegian part is thicker than that used elsewhere in the codex and appears to have been trimmed in connection with the insertion of these folios into *Hauksbók*.⁷⁰ It is therefore quite possible that the second Norwegian part was not written under Haukr's supervision, but rather acquired as a finished product and then inserted in *Hauksbók*.⁷¹ In its present state, the second Norwegian section now consists of four folios, but some have been lost in the course of time.⁷² Had this part of the manuscript been preserved in its entirety, it might have been possible to form a hypothesis about its compiler's intentions. However, in its present state, it is hardly possible to go beyond the observation that the most apparent uniting feature of this part of the manuscript is that all its texts belong to an international clerical sphere and have probably been translated from Latin.

The more completely preserved first Norwegian section gives the impression of having been carefully planned. The editors of *Hauksbók* gave this section the unifying heading *Heimslýsing ok helgifræði* 'Description of the world and sacred learning'. This part consists of two quires, the first of which combines texts that deal with the geography of the world and the early history of humankind into a unified whole. Miscellaneous factual texts are placed side by side to form an encyclopedic description of the world and its early history. If the scribe of the first Norwegian section (or his sponsor) initially had an overarching plan and sought to construct a continuous, coherent text out of shorter passages drawn from various sources, it is primarily the first quire of the first Norwegian section that testifies to this. The second and final quire of this section seem less carefully planned, and the text here takes on the form of a miscellany where factual, even scholarly texts are combined with hortative and interpretive texts that belong to the religious and theological spheres. Fuller forms of a number of the texts in this compilation can be found in Icelandic manuscripts earlier and later than *Hauksbók*. This indicates that they have been intentionally excerpted from longer texts, and the compilation as a whole testifies to a lively traffic of texts across the North Atlantic between Norway and Iceland.

The following survey of the content of the texts assembled in the first Norwegian section aims to show that they are best characterized as factual, and that, when considered a unity, they form a kind of encyclopedic overview of the geography of the world and the early history of humankind. This strengthens the argument made in the previous section about the emphasis on the historical mode of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. Some texts of a more theological nature have been inserted toward the end of the first Norwegian section:⁷³

AM 544 4to fols. 1–8 (first quire of the first Norwegian section)

1. *Brunnr er einn í Paradísu* ‘There is a single well in Paradise’. A listing of the rivers of the world and various bodies of water with marvelous properties.⁷⁴ This text, which is also found with some variants in earlier Icelandic manuscripts,⁷⁵ has much material in common with the sections on rivers and bodies of water in Isidore’s *Etymologies* 13.21.19 and 13.⁷⁶ It is characteristic of this particular version of the list that it commences with the four rivers that spring from the well in Paradise (cf. Gen. 2:10–14).⁷⁷ The fountainhead of the four rivers from Paradise is an apt place to begin a survey of the world’s geography and early history when one considers that Paradise was indeed held to be the place where the human race originated. Following this introduction, the text lists important rivers in Asia and Europe. A more detailed exposition of lakes and ponds with marvelous properties in all three parts of the world follows, beginning with the Dead Sea close to the perceived center of the world. Although the Dead Sea is treated in more detail than the other bodies of water, the description is not remarkably detailed, and in general, the text is not particularly concerned with the special religious significance of this body of water (or others).
2. *Prologus* ‘Prologue’ (not to be confused with the *Prologus* of the *Prose Edda*). With its rubric ‘*Prologus*’ and a large decorated initial letter, this section looks as if it is a much better starting point for a coherent text than the first section.⁷⁸ *Prologus* is a rather brief text about the first chroniclers of events in the world, named as Moyses, Darius Frigius, Heroditus the Greek, and Feredcides.⁷⁹ The source for the text about the first chroniclers is held to be Isidore’s *Etymologies* (1.42).⁸⁰ Like the previous text in this section, this text is concerned with identifying the divine origin and subsequent spread of the topic it deals with. In short, it tells us that Moses was the first who committed worldly events to writing and that he primarily wrote what the Holy Spirit taught him.⁸¹ After Moses came other writers who chronicled secular events, beginning with the Trojan War.
3. *Frá Paradísu* ‘About Paradise’. *Hauksbók* returns to the subject of Paradise with this short text that briefly describes the location, the pleasures, and the inaccessibility of Paradise. Although the information given here primarily derives from Isidore’s *Etymologies* (14.3, 2–3), including the reference to the four rivers that flow from Paradise into this world (once again), other sources have also been drawn upon.

This section forms a clear introduction to the following section, which describes the part of the world now inhabited by humankind. A partial parallel to this text is found in AM 194 8vo, dated 1387.⁸² The contents of this other manuscript in many ways parallel those of the encyclopedic section of *Hauksbók*, as the presentation of the following items will show.

4. *Hér segir frá því hversu lönd liggja í veröldinni* ‘Here it is told how the lands are situated in the world’. This text is a direct continuation of the previous section, as the opening words ‘Of this inhabitation, India is the outermost’ shows,⁸³ contrasting the inhabited part of the world (‘this inhabitation’) with the now uninhabited earthly Paradise.⁸⁴ The text begins as a geographical treatise listing the lands of the known world and their location in relation to one another, but it concludes before the description of the circle of the lands is complete, leaving out any reference to Africa and the part of Europe that is located west of the Holy Roman Empire. The text devotes considerable attention to places connected with important events in the (salvific) history of the world. As the text moves from place to place, it dutifully lists the apostles who preached in the various regions of the world,⁸⁵ the descendants of Noah who settled the various regions,⁸⁶ and places where major biblical or religious events took place, etc.⁸⁷ The greater part of both biblical history and the history of the early Church unfolded in Asia, and this explains why the text devotes most attention to this part of the world. Northern Europe, by contrast, is less tightly linked with biblical history and the wanderings of the apostles.⁸⁸ Where relevant, the text takes care to mention the four rivers that flow from Paradise and thus creates cohesion between this text and the previous one(s). It is especially noteworthy that, in its description of Byzantium and the Turks, the text pauses to explain that ‘it is also claimed by many – according to old books – that Sweden was settled from this area, and Norway from Sweden, and Iceland from Norway, and Greenland from Iceland’.⁸⁹
5. *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* ‘On the origin of idolatry’. The geographical text is followed by the text on the origin of idolatry discussed in this chapter. Although there is no obvious direct link between the two texts, one can see this text as a continuation of the description of the history of the world. Having begun with geographical sections on rivers and the inhabited parts of the world, the compiler follows up with a text describing man’s place in the world. As mentioned above, this text begins with Adam and Eve in Paradise and follows with the history of the fall and its consequences – focusing on the rise and consequences

of disbelief and idolatry. A thematic link with the following text is provided by a brief reference to Noah and his sons.⁹⁰

6. *Frá því hvar hverr Nóa sona byggði heiminn* 'About where in the world each of the sons of Noah settled'. Having described (great parts of) the world, the origin of humankind, its expulsion from Paradise, the origin of disbelief, and also having introduced Noah and his sons, the first Norwegian section now briefly lists the names of the various descendants of Noah and the places they settled. Each of Noah's three sons received one part of the world. Shem settled in Asia, Japheth in Europe, and Ham in Africa.⁹¹
7. *Hér segir frá marghátuðum þjóðum* 'Here many kinds of peoples are presented'. After listing the peoples of the world, using the descendants of Noah and the locations in which they settled as an organizational backbone, *Hauksbók* turns to the fabulous peoples of the world; the first being the *panfagi* 'all-eaters' of Bláland, i.e. 'Ethiopia'.⁹²

AM 544 4to fols. 9–14 (second quire of the first Norwegian section)

Hér segir frá marghátuðum þjóðum continues in the second quire of the first Norwegian section. From this point onwards, it becomes more difficult to discern an organizing principle, and the manuscript assumes a miscellanic character.

8. *Hér segir ...* 'Here it says ...'⁹³ A sermon on superstition attributed to Augustine in the text. It appears to be an Old Norse reworking of Ælfric's *De auguriis*.⁹⁴ Where the sermon on idolatry, as argued above, left the homiletic mode as it progressed, *Hér segir ...* retains this mode throughout and ends with an exhortation always to act in accordance with the will of God and an 'Amen' written in *litterae notabiliores*.
9. Two excerpts from *Elucidarius* follow the sermon on superstition. The second excerpt has been divided into three sections. All four passages retain the dialogue form of *Elucidarius*, and each has been given a separate heading:

Hér segir hvaðan blót skurðgóða hófusk 'Whence the sacrifices to idols originated', an excerpt from *Elucidarius* (2.75–6). It tells how idolatry arose in connection with the building of the Tower of Babel. The passage will be briefly discussed in [Chapter 5](#). At this point, it should be mentioned that the passage is written

in a historical mode, although it, like *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, stresses the demonic interpretation of disbelief.

Hér segir frá draumum 'About dreams', an excerpt from *Elucidarius* (3.32) about the origin of dreams.

Hér segir frá Antichristo 'About Antichrist', an excerpt from *Elucidarius* (3.33–7) telling of the future birth of Antichrist in Babylon and about his rule and fall on Mount Olivet.⁹⁵

Um upprísu kvíkra ok dauð[r]a 'On the resurrection of the living and the dead'. An excerpt from *Elucidarius* (3.38–42) dealing with the last trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, and the question of what happens to those who are still alive when the resurrection of the dead occurs.

10. *Um imbrudagahald* 'Concerning the observance of the Ember days'. This short sermon explains how the Ember days originated, what they are and gives various non-literal interpretations of their meaning. Parallel texts are also found in the Icelandic Homily Book and in the fourteenth-century Norwegian manuscript AM 114a 4to. Like the sermon on superstition (item 8), *Um imbrudagahald* is clearly a sermon, and it does not betray the same kind of historical interest that one could see in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. The author retains a hortative and expository mode throughout and ends with an exhortation to observe the Ember days. A doxology and an 'A–M–E–N', not completely written out, conclude the sermon.⁹⁶
11. *Um regnboga* 'Concerning the rainbow'. A short exposition of the allegorical significance of the rainbow. This text and the previous one both share an enumerative style that gives various differing interpretations of a single phenomenon (the Ember days and the rainbow, respectively). Parallel texts are found in Icelandic manuscripts.⁹⁷
12. *Um sólstoð[u]r* 'Concerning solstices'. This text and the following both derive from the so-called *Stjörnu-Odda tal*, 'The calculation of Stjörnu-Oddi'. It is a somewhat garbled version of Stjörnu-Oddi's listing,⁹⁸ of the positions of the sun at the summer and winter solstices in the interval between two leap years.
13. *Um uppstigning sólar ok niðrsetning* 'About the rising and setting of the sun'. A direct continuation of the previous text dealing with the cycle of the sun throughout the year.⁹⁹
14. *Um borgaskipan ok legstaði heilagra manna* 'An inventory of cities and the burial places of saints'. This fragmentary listing of cities and their relics centers its attention on Rome and Constantinople.¹⁰⁰

With this, the first Norwegian section of *Hauksbók* comes to an end. It should be clear from the foregoing that the first Norwegian section of *Hauksbók* shares some of its material with two Icelandic manuscripts that are both predominantly encyclopedic in nature: AM 194 8vo and AM 731 4to. These two manuscripts postdate *Hauksbók* – the main scribe of AM 194 8vo dates his efforts to 1387,¹⁰¹ while AM 731 4to was written by Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá in 1641 – but they draw on older materials and appear to be independent of *Hauksbók*.¹⁰² A quick look at the organization of textual materials in the encyclopedic part of AM 194 8vo will show that AM 194 8vo and *Hauksbók* follow a similar pattern of textual organization, even though the two manuscripts are by no means identical.¹⁰³ The second quire of AM 194 8vo begins with a long section that Kålund gave the title *Landafræði*, although its content is much more varied than this title suggests.¹⁰⁴ The text begins by speaking about Moses, the first to write sacred history (= 2 above). A substantial passage about Paradise follows, concluding with a listing of the four rivers that flow from Paradise (= 3, also 1). A description of how the world was divided between the three sons of Noah (= 6) and a listing of the lands of the world (= 4) come next. A listing of the travel distances between various places follows (not paralleled by *Hauksbók*). This leads to a listing of holy places and relics in Italy, Constantinople, and Jerusalem (= 14). *Landafræði* concludes with a long section on Jerusalem and is followed by miscellaneous and less organized materials. The first lists the five ecumenical councils, the second explains the origin of the Rogation days, the third lists the Ten Commandments, the fourth various strange peoples (= 7), the fifth deals with marvelous bodies of water (= 1), the sixth lists various kinds of snakes, etc.

Comparison with AM 194 8vo thus shows that the first Norwegian section of *Hauksbók*, far from being a haphazard conglomeration of factual miscellanea, presents material that can be paralleled in another manuscript, and that the compiler of the first Norwegian section has made an effort to present the materials in a logical order. This section can then be interpreted as an attempt to combine separate texts so that they add up to a whole that presents an encyclopedic overview of both the geography of the world and the early history of humankind.¹⁰⁵ Far from haphazardly gathering factual miscellanea, the compiler had a clear aim and has made a conscious effort to present the materials in a logical order. It is into this collection of materials that the compiler of the manuscript also added a historical, rather than homiletic text on the origin of the (near) universal phenomenon of disbelief and idolatry.

Universal Pagan Gods

When one widens the perspective and surveys the contents of *Hauksbók* in its entirety it becomes apparent that the compilation betrays a considerable interest in paganism as a historical phenomenon. In addition to *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, which has already been discussed in some detail, other texts, such as *Trójumanna saga*, *Landnámabók*, and *Kristni saga*, show a similar interest.¹⁰⁶ *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga* are concerned in various ways with paganism in its particular local Icelandic context, while *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and *Trójumanna saga* both aspire to universality. This universalizing tendency is most evident in the treatment of pagan gods in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*. Various pagan gods are mentioned in the course of the text, but the focus is on the five gods named Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and Mercury. These names are well-known labels of Roman deities, but they should only be seen as convenient Roman appellations for deified humans held to enjoy/have enjoyed much wider veneration.¹⁰⁷ Thus the subject of the text is not the disbelief of the Romans or disbelief in the classical world but disbelief in general, or the universal phenomenon of disbelief.¹⁰⁸ The all-embracing character of the text becomes clear when *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* explains that some call Jupiter Þórr, and that Mercury and Venus were called Óðinn and Frigg in Danish.¹⁰⁹

As will be argued in this section, the implication of this associative strategy of alignment is that the two sets of names, the Roman and the Norse, should be seen as referring to a single group of deities that were known by different names in different places. Furthermore, this group of deities should not be thought of as deities shared by speakers of Latin and speakers of Norse alone, but rather as a universal set of (false) gods venerated by humankind in the interim between the rejection of the true faith and the rise of Christianity. Some of these deities, such as Þórr/Jupiter, should be taken to be universally known, while in other cases, knowledge of a particular false deity might not have reached a particular people (yet). The identifications in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* are particularly noteworthy because its immediate exemplar, Ælfric's *De falsis diis*, emphatically states that such identifications are erroneous.¹¹⁰ The Old Norse text therefore differs markedly from its immediate source in its application of this universalizing perspective.

The practice of identifying deities across pantheons is well known and widely attested, but the wider implications of such equations are rarely discussed in the context of Old Norse literature, where scholarship has focused on the designations rather than their implications – which is to

say that the evidence has been gathered and charts compiled, but the wider underlying idea has not been explored to any considerable extent.¹¹¹ This alignment is generally referred to as *interpretatio* ‘interpretation, translation’ – a noun that can be qualified by an adjective determining and delimiting the cultural sphere within which a certain cultural phenomenon is interpreted or translated; thus *interpretatio norræna* is the ‘Norse interpretation’ of some non-Norse phenomenon and *interpretatio romana* is the ‘Roman interpretation’ of some non-Roman phenomenon, etc. More broadly, some scholars have referred to the phenomenon as *interpretatio indigena* ‘native interpretation’.¹¹² The basic idea is that a foreign concept or figure is understood in terms of a local concept or figure.

The dividing lines between interpretation, equation, and identification are not always easy to determine, but most of the texts dealt with in this volume belong firmly in the identification camp, although their identifications may differ significantly.¹¹³ In general, the idea is not that, e.g., the Norse god Óðinn and the Roman god Mercury are alike or that Óðinn is similar to Mercury in some respect or other (both are, e.g., associated with divination and poetry) but rather that Óðinn *is* Mercury: ‘There was some man who was called Mercury ... he was called Óðinn in the Danish tongue’ (cf. n. 109). ‘Mercury’ and ‘Óðinn’ should therefore be seen as two different linguistic signs pointing to the same referent. The interchangeable nature of such signs is perhaps best illustrated by texts that are inconsistent in their use of Roman and Old Norse designations. The mythological introduction to the *Hauksbók* version of *Trójumanna saga*, e.g., wavers between referring to its central character as Þórr and Jupiter, and this character’s wife is inconsistently referred to as both Juno and Sif.¹¹⁴ As this vacillation indicates, the scribe of this part of *Hauksbók* did not consider Þórr and Jupiter two different gods but envisioned one god with two different names. The same applies to Juno and Sif. The names may belong to different traditions, but they are held to refer to the same deity. Another example is found in *Hauksbók*’s version of *Breta sögur* in a passage that describes how Brutus’ men chance upon an old temple and ‘statues of Gefjun, Saturn and Jupiter were therein ... then they lit three fires, one for Óðinn, another for Þórr and a third for Gefjun’.¹¹⁵ In the first part of this quotation, the Latin names of the male deities are used (i.e. Saturn and Jupiter), while the second half uses the Norse names (Óðinn and Þórr).¹¹⁶

This practice of equating or identifying the gods of various areas or peoples with one another has ancient roots and is widely attested not only from classical Greece and Rome but also in testimonies from the ancient Near East.¹¹⁷ Yet, only a single attestation of the term *interpretatio* in the

special technical sense used in modern scholarship has been found in classical literature. It occurs in a much-discussed passage in Tacitus' *Germania* dealing with the religion of the Germanic tribe of the Nahanarvali. Tacitus writes:

In the land of the Nahanarvali a grove long held in awe is displayed. A priest in woman's dress presides, but they speak of the gods in Roman translation [*interpretatione romana*] as Castor and Pollux: they have the same divine power; the actual name is the Alci. There are no images, no trace of foreign superstition, yet they are worshipped as young men and brothers.¹¹⁸

The exact meaning of the words *interpretatio romana* in Tacitus' usage is, as so often when it comes to this author, difficult to pin down, but it is clear that Tacitus aligns the Roman divine twins Castor and Pollux, the Castores, with the Alci of the Germanic Nahanarvali.¹¹⁹ The two pairs of divinities have the same divine power (*ea vis numini*) and are in some ontological sense identical, although their names and cults betray superficial dissimilarities. Seen from Tacitus' perspective, the identity of the two pairs should not be explained through a diffusionist model which posits a spread from the Romans or some other people to the Nahanarvali, at least not in recent times, for the cult does not bear any marks of 'foreign superstition'. Tacitus hence regards the cult of the divine brothers as native to the Nahanarvali. Although rarely named, this practice of 'interpretation' permeated the ethnographic traditions of antiquity.¹²⁰ In using this strategy, Tacitus therefore adheres to the conventions of the genre within which he is writing.¹²¹ However, he is, as mentioned, the only author who provides a name for the strategy.

In the example above, Tacitus made it clear that he equated the Roman and Germanic manifestations of a particular divine pair with each other. In other cases, the equation is implicit, and he is content with using Roman designations, as when he names the gods the Germani most venerate Mercury, Hercules, and Mars:

As for gods, Mercury is the one they [the Germani] worship most, and on certain days they think it right to propitiate him even with human victims. They appease Hercules and Mars with lawful animals. Part of the Suebi also sacrifices to Isis. I have not ascertained the source from which this foreign rite originates, but the fact remains that the image itself, fashioned in the form of a light ship, proves that the cult is imported.¹²²

Here Tacitus merely mentions the Roman names of the deities, leaving out (for whatever reason) their Germanic names. The veneration of deities referred to by the Germani at large as Mercury, Hercules, and Mars

is contrasted with the cult of Isis, which is restricted to a minority group. While Tacitus regards the cult of the three male gods as aboriginal to the Germani, he sees the cult of Isis as an imported one, and one should therefore not see the reference to this goddess as a reference to some Germanic goddess in the guise of *interpretatio romana*.¹²³ It is conceivable that the Germani venerated the three male deities (Mercury, Hercules, and Mars) under their Germanic names, but these names, whatever they might have been, are not given in the text and cannot be determined with certainty. The fact that Tacitus uses Roman designations shows, as in the case of the Alci, that the three gods are to be considered universal gods venerated among Romans as well as Germani.

Another example of the practice of *interpretatio* revealing that the gods were indeed thought of as universal can be found in Caesar's description of his Gallic war in a passage dealing with the kinds of deities venerated by the Galli and the Germani. In one place, we learn that the Galli venerate Mercury the most, but also Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva and that they have 'more or less the same opinion about these gods as other peoples'.¹²⁴ Shortly thereafter, Caesar contrasts the relatively civilized Galli with the barbarous Germani and states that the latter, in contrast to the Galli, venerate only the deities they can see with their own eyes and from whom they clearly benefit, namely Sol, 'Sun', Vulcanus, '(probably) Fire', and Luna, 'Moon', and that 'they have not even heard of the other gods'.¹²⁵ The model that underlies Caesar's description at this point clearly posits that there is a certain set of gods. The Galli have reached such an advanced stage of civilization that they have fairly standard ideas about these gods, save for the fact that they have an unusual preference for Mercury. The Germani, on the other hand, are familiar with only a small selection of the gods. Had Caesar's model been the hierarchical model of disbeliefs laid out in the [previous chapter](#), he would have placed the Germanic tribes on the first, least reprobate, level. But Caesar thinks in different terms, and his valorization of the different stages runs counter to that of Nachor in *Barlaams saga*. He considers the cult of the elements of nature the least developed, i.e. the most primitive, rather than the least degenerate kind of cult. The cult of individualized anthropomorphic deities, like that found among Romans and Galli, is in his view the hallmark of a more advanced cultural stage than, say, solar worship.

It was not only the Romans at the center of imperial power who imposed their concept of universal deities on Germanic deities, thus perhaps attempting to absorb provincial Germanic deities by giving them

names of their own. Epigraphic evidence indicates that Roman legionaries stationed in the provinces were eager to placate deities local to the regions in which they were stationed.¹²⁶ Numerous votive inscriptions carrying double names, consisting of one Roman and one Germanic component, have been preserved from the northernmost part of the empire,¹²⁷ pointing to a similar alignment of native and Roman deities. Among such inscriptions, one can find testimonies to the worship of 'Germanic' variants of Mercury, Hercules, and Mars (and occasionally other Roman gods). Examples of such divinities are the 'Cimbrian Mercury' (Mercurius Cimbrianus),¹²⁸ the 'man/hero-killing Mars' (Mars Halamardus),¹²⁹ 'Assembly-Mars' (Mars Thincsus),¹³⁰ and others.¹³¹ The names of these divinities are all Roman, but their Germanic epithets reveal that these Martes and Mercurii have a Germanic component and that they should be considered syncretized or Romanized versions of Germanic deities (or Germanized versions of Roman deities) rather than generic Roman gods. On the basis of such inscriptions, which were generally commissioned by individuals carrying Roman names or by entire regiments, one can assume that people in areas where Germanic languages were spoken aligned, and even identified, some Germanic deities with Roman ones, or at least saw some of local gods, e.g. Mars Halamardus, as an aspect of the generic Mars venerated throughout the Roman Empire. In these and similar cases, the Romanization is irreversible. Although Mars Thincsus is conventionally equated with *Teiwaz (> ON Týr) and the Mercury of these inscriptions is equated with *Wōðanaz (> ON Óðinn),¹³² the Germanic names of the mentioned deities cannot be uncovered with certainty.¹³³ In the cases where an altar is dedicated to a deity simply named Mercury or Mars,¹³⁴ it is in many cases impossible to say whether the dedicatee had the generic Roman deity or some local counterpart in mind if the iconography does not provide any clues. However, the process of *interpretatio* makes it likely that he did not in fact distinguish between the two.

In addition to examples of the practice of *interpretatio*, the literature of classical antiquity also provides discursive evidence for the processes of identification presupposed by *interpretatio*. A passage in Cicero's dialogue on the nature of the gods, *De natura deorum*, can serve as an illustration of this. At one point in the rebuttal of the Epicurean Vellius' view of the gods, the academic Cotta argues that each people conceives of the gods in different, culturally determined ways (e.g. the peoples of Argos, Lanuvium, and Rome each envision Juno in their own manner). This practice extends even to the names of the gods:

Are we also to assume that the gods bear the names which we allot them? Yet they have as many names as there are human languages. Wherever you go, your name remains Velleius, but unlike you, Vulcan does not bear the same name in Italy, France, and Spain.¹³⁵

A certain goddess, who is called Juno among the Romans, is known among many different peoples, but each people knows her under a different name. The names of divinities differ from one language to another because they have been assigned by humans, and humans speak different languages.¹³⁶ The gods, however, irrespective of the names by which they are known, remain the same, ontologically speaking. Hence there is no guarantee that our names for them are their true or real names.¹³⁷

When it comes to the identifications of Norse and Roman deities, one finds a significant inconsistency across texts. In one study, Battista has shown how Óðinn is equated within a single group of Old Norse hagiographic texts, the sagas of the apostles, with no fewer than five different Roman gods, namely Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Hercules, and Saturn.¹³⁸ Battista suggests that this variability is to be explained by a lack of familiarity among Old Norse translators with the Old Norse and Roman pantheons, but some inconsistency is probably also due to systemic considerations.¹³⁹ While Mercury may be considered the canonical Roman manifestation of Óðinn (cf. the discussion of the names of the days of the week below), as poetry and divination belong to the spheres of competence of both gods, other equations may be dictated by the context in which mention is made of the deity. If, e.g., Jupiter appears alongside another male god, it could be that his function as head of the Roman pantheon determined his identification with Óðinn as head of the Norse pantheon, or if reference is made to Jupiter's wife (Juno/Venus), the marital position will prescribe an identification with Óðinn, since Óðinn's wife (Frigg or Freyja) enjoys a more prominent position in the mythological system than Þórr's wife, Sif. It is, however, not possible to account for all the identifications of Óðinn in this manner.

Returning to the five deities highlighted in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, it is apparent that they have not been selected at random among the many gods. Rather, they have been singled out because their names occur in the Latin names of the days of the week. The seven-day week was introduced among speakers of Germanic languages following the increased contact between the Roman Empire and the northern barbarian tribes at some point in the first centuries AD.¹⁴⁰ Through loan-translation, the Roman names of the days of the week were replaced with Germanic names in such a way that the Roman deity *and* celestial object mentioned in the

name of a given day were replaced with the name of a Germanic deity or the Germanic name of a celestial object. This loan process may have taken place in the fourth century, as suggested by Green, but it may also have happened as late as in the seventh or eighth century, as argued by Shaw.¹⁴¹ In time, Scandinavians also adopted the seven-day week and its naming system.¹⁴² It has proven impossible to establish a direct source for the Scandinavian system with certainty, but it is likely to have come through speakers of western or southern Germanic languages rather than directly from Latin.

Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk mentions most of the Norse names for the days of the week and also names the Roman deity to which the particular days were dedicated.

Table 3.1 shows that, in Old Norse, the day of Mars (*dies Martis*) became the day of Týr, Old Norse *Týsdagr*, the day of Mercury was devoted to Óðinn, and the day of Venus to Frigg.¹⁴³ The sun and the moon received one day each (*sunnudagr* and *mánadagr*). *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* also mentions that the seventh day of the week was given to Saturn, who was the oldest father of all those gods, but no Norse equivalent is mentioned. The Latinate audience of the text would easily have recognized that the day referred to was Saturday, *dies Saturni*, and the original audience of the Old English text would probably also have recognized that their *Sæterndæg* was named after that same god. In Old Norse, however, the seventh day has been assigned to the activity of washing rather than to a god, and it is called *laugardagr* ‘bath day’ (*laug* means ‘bath’ or ‘bath water’), alternatively *þváttdagr* (*þváttr* means ‘bathing’/‘washing’).¹⁴⁴ This deviation from the established pattern was recognized already in the Middle Ages, as one may see in the encyclopedic section of manuscript GkS 1812 4to, one of the oldest preserved Icelandic manuscripts (dated 1192), where one can

Table 3.1 *Names of the days of the week according to Um þat hvaðan*

	Latin		Old Norse
Sunday	<i>Dies Solis</i> – Day of Sun	≈	<i>Sunnudagr</i> – Day of Sunna/the sun
Monday	<i>Dies Lunae</i> – Day of Moon	=	<i>Mánadagr</i> – Day of Máni/the moon
Tuesday	<i>Dies Martis</i> – Day of Mars	=	<i>Týsdagr</i> – Day of Týr
Wednesday	<i>Dies Mercurii</i> – Day of Mercury	=	<i>Óðinsdagr</i> – Day of Óðinn
Thursday	<i>Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk</i> skips this day		
Friday	<i>Dies Veneris</i> – Day of Venus	≈	<i>Frjádagr</i> – Day of Frigg/Freyja
Saturday	<i>Dies Saturni</i> – Day of Saturn	≠	(<i>Laugardagr</i> – Washing day)

read: “That day is called *laugardagr* which is called “Saturday” in other lands.’¹⁴⁵ Although the writer of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* gave Norse names for the Roman gods, he apparently saw no reason to acclimatize the text to its local Scandinavian cultural circumstances in this case, and he kept the assignation of the seventh day to Saturn without presenting the Old Norse name for that particular day. The deviant naming of Saturday in Scandinavian, and in the Germanic names of the days of the week in general, points to a hole in the system of correspondences between Norse and Roman gods. When the days of the week were given Germanic names, no obvious Germanic candidate for Saturn presented itself.¹⁴⁶ Viewing this from the perspective of *interpretatio*, it may be said that the divinity whom the Romans knew under the name of Saturn was still unknown among the Germani when the days of the week were named.

Another sign of the reluctance to adjust the text fully to Norse circumstances is that the text assigns the sixth day to Frigg rather than Freyja. In the Old English exemplar, Venus is identified with Frig (ON Frigg), but in the Scandinavian context of the Old Norse version, Freyja, the goddess of love, would have been a more suitable candidate for an Old Norse version of Venus. The first part of the Old Norse name for Friday, *frjá-*, was commonly associated with Freyja, and *frjádagr* was thus understood as ‘the day of Freyja’.¹⁴⁷ Another text in *Hauksbók* even uses the (uniquely attested) form *freyjudagr*, ‘Freyja’s day’.¹⁴⁸ Conversely, a form associated with Frigg, such as **frigjardagr* ‘day of Frigg’ is not found in Old Norse.¹⁴⁹ Had the writer of the Old Norse text insisted upon acclimatizing the text to the Scandinavian context, one would expect that he would also have written that the sixth day was given to Freyja.

With an eye to the doctrine about the chronological development of disbelief outlined in *Barlaams saga* and in the present text, it is also interesting to note that the veneration of the two main celestial objects, the sun and the moon, left its mark on the names of the days of the week. According to this doctrine, the elements of nature were venerated before humankind began worshipping humans; it is therefore fitting that it is the first days of the week that are dedicated to the sun and the moon respectively. One can see this in Latin and Old English, as well as in Old Norse, where these days are named *sunnudagr* ‘sun day’ and *mánadagr* ‘moon day’. *Sunnudagr* stands out among the Old Norse names of the days of the week in that it does not appear to have been acclimatized to Old Norse to the same extent as the remaining names. In Old Norse, the customary designation for the sun is *sól* rather than *sunna*. One would therefore expect **sólardagr*, but this term is not attested. Old Norse *sunnudagr* may be explained as

a loanword from some other Germanic language (such as OE *sunne* or OS *sunne*) but this does not explain why the Scandinavians, who happily adapted the names of the other days of the week to Norse through loan-translations, should have been reluctant to do the same in the case of Sunday.¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, one may see *sunna* as an archaic Old Norse word for the sun that was replaced by *sól* as the standard unmarked term at some point in the history of the language, much as Old Norse *máni*, ‘moon’, in Modern Icelandic has been replaced by *tungl*, which in Old Norse meant ‘celestial object’, as the unmarked term for the moon. The fact that the only other attestations of ON *sunna* are found in lists of *heiti*, poetic synonyms, for the sun in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Alvíssmál* may point in this direction, since the skaldic vocabulary in many cases retains archaic words that have gone out of use in unmarked language.¹⁵¹

Um þat hvaðan ótru hófsk, then, originated as a sermon but was transformed into a historical text describing the early history of how humankind turned from the true faith to paganism. The text forms a part of an encyclopedic compilation of a universal nature describing the rivers of the world, the peoples of the world, etc. The universalizing tendencies of the *Um þat hvaðan ótru hófsk* are particularly clear when it departs from its original source by leaving out Ælfric’s remark that the Danes are mistaken in identifying the gods in the respective pantheons with one another. In the first Norwegian section of *Hauksbók*, the rivers and peoples of the world are all traced to common origins. The same goes for disbelief, although the common origin is of a different nature. The rivers stem from the paradisaical well and the various peoples from Noah, disbelief arose when humankind, spurred by the devil, turned from God. Although it may manifest itself in superficially different ways, it is essentially the same throughout the world. The core gods may be known under different names and the cultic practices of their worshippers may vary, but once one penetrates beneath the surface, one sees that they are the same.

There are naturally limits to the universalism espoused by this and other texts. The universalist model is not a fully worked out and systematized physical theology where all deities, or even the majority of them, are given definite and invariable labels and are identifiable with particular individuals who each lived at a specific time and place. Therefore Óðinn is not only Mercury, he is also Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, and Hercules. In their inconsistency, the Norse identifications were equivalent to the identifications current in the classical world.¹⁵² One could resolve this by moving up one rung on the ladder of abstraction, as did the Greeks and Romans, who were perhaps more philosophically inclined than the ancient Scandinavians, and

claim that all gods were manifestations of different aspects of a single deity. However, the ancient Scandinavians did not follow this line of thought, and besides, it is incompatible with the euhemeristic model favored by the learned Scandinavians of the Middle Ages.

One advantage of the universalist model is that it has the potential to expand vastly the amount of information that is available on a single deity. The equation of Mars and Týr, to take one example, meant that the relatively slim dossier of Týr potentially could be supplied with Martian materials and iconography. Medieval Scandinavian authors exercised great moderation in this respect, but, as will be seen in the [Epilogue](#), in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, learned mythologists began to explore these possibilities with less restraint and remarkable results.

The Byzantine Gods of Saxo Grammaticus

For readers who are accustomed to engaging with the Scandinavian mythology in its vernacular Old Norse packaging, coming to Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta danorum* (c. 1200), or 'Deeds of the Danes', is like entering a new world that is outlandish and strangely familiar at the same time.¹ New dimensions of well-known characters are revealed, and tales are twisted and turned, occasionally on their head. To take one example, Saxo's Baldr (or Balderus as he calls him) is not a pale paragon of all that is good and beautiful who has to die because he, in his utter unblemished goodness, is out of place in the flawed order created and temporarily maintained by Óðinn and his confederates. In Saxo's vision, Baldr does not perish as a result of Loki's malicious scheming. Instead he is portrayed as a depraved voyeur who stalks a lovely human princess by the name of Nanna, spying on her as she is bathing.

How does one account for the familiar yet foreign countenance of Scandinavian mythology in Saxo's work? In some cases, he probably drew on East Norse or Danish traditions at variance with the Icelandic or West Norse material we find reflected in the Snorronian corpus.² But he is also well known to have had recourse to West Norse informants and source men, and it is tempting to explain the inconsistencies between Saxo and the Old Norse sources by simply attributing them to Saxo's peculiar genius, as Dumézil did in his monograph on Saxo's account of King Hadingus: '[I]f we view Saxo's originalities as a totality ... then we shall find that they are the result of a very personal labor of literary transposition.'³ In Dumézil's view, haphazard transpositions and eccentric innovations sharply demarcate Saxo's work from the Norse vernacular tradition that is held to transmit faithfully the mythological traditions of yore.

Although the flexible and instable nature of the mythical theology should be borne in mind, Saxo maintains such a strong authorial presence in his work that one almost unwittingly assumes that his mythology

is more idiosyncratic than most. His deviations from the Norse material are often explained as willed or conscious inversions and transpositions for some inscrutable purpose,⁴ or perhaps in order to vilify, at least to a certain extent, the traditional gods of the Scandinavians and their worshippers. But since Saxo's larger aim explicitly was to celebrate the glorious history of the fatherland and to describe the ancient and illustrious lineage of King Valdemar II of Denmark (*Praefatio* 1.3 and 1.6), he had to exercise some restraint when it came to the pagan past and could not allow himself to be carried away in bigotry. His account of the paganism of the Wends, antagonists of the Danes much later in his work, shows that he had full command of the polemic tropes that conventionally accompanied medieval descriptions of paganism and, in particular, idolatry.⁵ Thus he describes in unusual detail not only the worship paid by the Wends to Suantouithus and the origin of the cult (14.39.3–13), he also gives a detailed account of the spectacle caused by the Danes as they overturn the god. Saxo also describes a demon fleeing the temple in the shape of a black animal and he details the shame felt by the pagans as they realize the error of their ways and see how the idol is chopped to pieces and used to fire up the cauldrons in which the Danes cook their dinner (14.39.31–4). Shortly thereafter, the Danes are described destroying additional idols, named Rugiaeuithus, Poreuithus, and Porenutius, nearby (14.39.38–45). These descriptions, though far from wholly conventional, all include a number of conventional tropes found in accounts of paganism in general and in descriptions of the destruction of idols in particular. When Saxo refrains from using these tropes to describe the paganism of the Danes, this may well have been a conscious choice. He even displays considerable sympathetic awareness and tolerance, remarking that it is no wonder that the ancient Danes were misled into venerating false gods when even the Romans, sophisticated though they were, fell into the same trap.⁶

Saxo adheres to the euhemeristic explanatory framework and largely steers clear of its possible demonological subtext. It is mainly in his depiction of the unfortunate religious beliefs of the Danish king Gormo (8.14.20–15.13) that Saxo goes further in his critique than merely claiming that the gods venerated by the pre-Christian Danes were humans unworthy of receiving divine honors. The account of the pagan Gormo and his erroneous ways in matters of religion is set at a point in time in which Christianity has begun to advance toward Scandinavia. King Gormo had accepted the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and wondered what kind of reward he himself would reap for always being willing to offer worship the gods.⁷ However, the recipient of Gormo's veneration is not one of

the gods traditionally mentioned in Scandinavian sources but one of their antagonists, Útgarða-Loki or Utgarthilocus as Saxo calls him (8.14.20).⁸ When Gormo learns that the beneficiary of his votive offerings is in fact a fetid giant chained hand and foot in a dark cavern guarded by poisonous snakes and other death-dealing monsters, he dies of sheer agony. This account is set at the point in time when the two religious systems are beginning to confront one another in Scandinavia. Gormo has learned of the immortality of the soul and Thorkillus, the messenger who reveals to Gormo the true nature of his deity, had already acquired the rudiments of the Christian faith.⁹ This chronological context may also explain the extraordinarily critical tenor of Saxo's account. Medieval Scandinavian literature may describe pre-Christian beliefs and practices in relatively neutral terms (or at least without explicit condemnation) as long as they are described in and of themselves. Hostile attitudes and denunciations of pre-Christian religion primarily surface when the old set of beliefs is confronted by the new.¹⁰ The account of King Gormo provides a clear illustration of this.

The important position that the Norse gods and accounts of them held in Scandinavian tradition meant that Saxo could not disregard them altogether. This would deprive him of a substantial amount of material and thus obstruct him in his primary endeavor, which was to create a monumental past for the fatherland of the Danes.¹¹ It would also deny existence to a central force of the pre-Christian past, to which a rich place-name lore still bore witness in Saxo's day and which had also left permanent marks of its importance on Scandinavian landscapes. One example of the last is Baldr's grave mound, whose reputation was still thriving when Saxo wrote his account (see 3.3.8).¹²

Since the pagan gods were a force too strong to be ignored, Saxo was obliged to find ways he could integrate them into his projection of the Danish past without glorifying or vilifying them excessively, but also without challenging the priority of the Christian faith. The solution he opted for, his physical theology as it were, was to turn the Scandinavian pantheon into a very human council residing in Byzantium rather than on some mountaintop in the style of the Olympian gods or in an otherworldly mythic location such as the Norse *Íðavöllr*. The members of Saxo's Byzantine council were all human, but they were able to work magic, claimed divine powers, and yearned to be venerated as gods. Although Saxo repeatedly refers to them as gods, he stresses that he is merely following convention in this respect and that they do not possess true divinity.¹³ They are not omnipotent, either, and depend on human help.¹⁴ Saxo even

describes theomachy of sorts, in the form of a great naval battle between gods and humans from which the humans, not the gods, emerge as victors. Saxo comments that it may strain belief that humans overcame the gods, but that it is confirmed by ancient tradition.¹⁵ Saxo's handling of traditional Scandinavian materials and narratives is, as mentioned, often idiosyncratic and original, and although gods in Scandinavian and other mythologies are often portrayed as members of divine councils,¹⁶ no exact parallels to Saxo's Byzantine council are known.¹⁷

When it comes to finding a new place for the old gods in a world where the Christian outlook prevails, Saxo's methods were not utterly dissimilar from those of other Northern texts that were grappling with this same challenge, most notably the prologue and frame narrative of the first part of the *Prose Edda* (to be discussed in the [following chapter](#)) and *Ynglinga saga*.¹⁸ These texts, like Saxo, locate the true/original home of the Norse gods in the South-East, far from Scandinavia (in Troy and in the region north of the Black Sea, respectively). All three works display a common concern with the origin of the Æsir-cult in the North. This was a field of knowledge in which the lack of suitable traditional sources spurred Saxo and the vernacular writers of Norse traditions to display considerable degrees of inventiveness. One strategy they have in common is that all use autoeuhemerization (the feigning of divinity by humans) as their basic explanatory framework, a model that the Church had used for almost a millennium to comprehend and invalidate polytheistic systems of belief.

Saxo, however, served two masters and had to please both in his grand synthesis of Scandinavian and classical tradition. In addition to his historicist and euhemerizing strategy, the conventions of classical literature, which he strove to emulate, required that transcendental powers mightier than the human also play a part (however restricted) in the unfolding of history. This compelled him to include another level of divinities above the false gods. In this way, he ended up with a two-storied model, in which autoeuhemerizing wizards occupied the lower level and deities whose nature and powers are more difficult for us to define with certainty occupied the higher.¹⁹ Although these gods rarely play active parts in the narratives, they are talked about. To the characters of Saxo's narrative, and even to Saxo himself (as we shall see), they are forces to be reckoned with. These conflicting demands probably go some way to explain the multifariousness of Saxo's material about the pagan gods and the general lack of consistency with his own doctrinal statements about the nature of pagan gods.²⁰

The following will first outline Saxo's doctrine of the pagan gods and present some examples of how this doctrine is enacted in his narrative.

Thereafter, some attention will be given to the shadowy gods of the upper story of Saxo's historical narrative.

Doctrine

Saxo is quite clear that the gods traditionally venerated by the Scandinavians were not real deities. So although he uses the designation 'god', this should only be seen as a convenient shorthand for 'human imposters who has falsely assumed the garb of divinity'. Early in his work, he finds it appropriate to educate his readers about the nature and abilities of the pagan gods, so that 'the attitude of the skeptical reader should not dispute the illusions and marvels when I describe them later'.²¹ In the old days, he explains, there were three kinds of wizards, or mathematicians as he terms them, who each exercised their kind of magic:²²

- the first are the men of monstrous size whom the ancients had named giants (*gigantes*);
- the second are both smaller and smarter than the giants and knew the art of prophecy. Saxo calls them *magi* 'magicians', but perhaps they are better characterized as diviners.

The relations between these two groups, Saxo explains, were characterized by endemic warfare. The diviners eventually subdued the giants and acquired the reputation of being divinities. Both groups possess what we would consider supernatural abilities and expertise in performing ocular delusions, and they are able to conceal both their own outward appearance and that of others by changing their forms. One difference between the two is that only the diviners are able to foretell the future:

- the third kind of wizards sprang from unions of the two former kinds. They were both smaller and less skilled in magic than those. Yet, their powers were sufficient for them to be considered gods by those whom they had managed to deceive.

In spite of the prominent position he has given to this explicitly doctrinal section, Saxo does not put it to much use as an explanatory/interpretative framework in the body of his text.²³ Representatives of the first two groups occur, of course, with relative frequency in the pre-historical part of the work (books 1–9) – although Saxo never directly assigns Óðinn and his (divine) associates to the second group and Óðinn, as mentioned in [note 14](#), relies on wizards to foretell the future – but there are no great battles between gods and giants in Saxo's narrative. Nor does the second

group appear to have subdued the first group.²⁴ It is significant in this doctrinal section that Saxo, although he rejects the existence of the gods, does allow for the existence of giants as well as people with, what we would consider, supernatural abilities in ancient times. The representatives of the second group (the diviners) fade from view in the later parts of Saxo's work, but the giants live on although they have retired to the inaccessible Scandinavian wilderness from which few return (*Pr.* 3).

The status of the giants is indeterminate in Saxo's work. Like their counterparts in the vernacular Norse mythological sources, they desire human brides (who rarely reciprocate),²⁵ and giant-slaying is a certain path to fame for young warriors; for instance, a band of Norwegian brothers are described as 'brave, strong, young, well proportioned, famed for their victories over giants, celebrated for their triumphs over peoples, and rich through their spoils in war'.²⁶ Yet, giants are not only primitive, lustful enemies of humans and victims of heroes. The legendary Danish king Hadingus counts them among the numinous powers as he cries out for help while fighting the Swedish king Asmundus (1.8.3), and another giant attempts to divine the will of the 'powers above' through magic (1.6.4). It is not explained who these divinities of the giant are.

In the light of the argument in the [previous chapter](#) about the universalizing tendency of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, by which the central Norse gods were identified with the central Roman gods, it is of interest to note that Saxo devotes a separate section to this question and emphatically rejects such identifications. He even provides a syllogistic proof of sorts, similar to that found in Ælfric's *De falsis diis* (see [Chapter 3](#)), that the identifications are false. The days devoted to Þórr and Óðinn in Scandinavia are devoted to Jupiter and Mercury in Latin. On this basis one could expect that Þórr would be identical to Jupiter and Óðinn to Mercury. If this were so, one would also expect that the familial ties between Þórr and Óðinn corresponded to those between Jupiter and Mercury, but this is not the case, for Þórr is the son of Óðinn, while Mercury is held to be a son of Jupiter. Had the gods been identical, in Saxo's view, Óðinn would have been a son of Þórr. Nevertheless, in spite of this non-identity between the gods of the two pantheons, Saxo continues, some hold the view that the traditional Scandinavian gods lent both their names and their cult from the gods of the Greeks and Romans.²⁷ The gods of the two pantheons thus appear to be identical, but upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that they are merely similar, and that the similarity has arisen because one group has actively acquired the characteristics of the other.

Practice

Considering Saxo's explicit denial of the identity of Scandinavian and classical gods, it is conspicuous that Scandinavian gods are regularly referred to by names of Roman deities. This is particularly pronounced in the poetry Saxo has incorporated in his narrative.²⁸ Saxo claims to have translated the poems faithfully from the vernacular into Latin (*Pr.* 1.3), but at the same time the poems are clearly highly dependent on Latin poetry and illustrate how Saxo attempts to fashion a majestic synthesis of the masterpieces of Northern and classical culture.²⁹

Examples can be found throughout the legendary/pre-historical part of Saxo's work. At one point, in the poems that precede Hagbarthus' death by hanging, one of his enemies asserts that he will soon walk to the kingdom of the severe Dis Pater (7.7.12), that is the god of the Roman underworld, while Hagbarthus retorts that he will not walk the path to the Tartarean gods alone (*Tartareos ... deos*, 7.8.16) – Tartaros being the name of the kingdom of the dead in Greek myth (as well as the name of the god of the dead). Earlier on in Saxo's text Asmundus wonders why the god of the river Styx (that is, the god of the dead) allows a certain Aswithus to return to life at night (5.11.4), etc.

Another set of examples can be found in Saxo's *Exhortationum series* 'Series of Exhortations'.³⁰ Thus when Hialto, one of the Danish warriors, realizes that war is at hand, he states that it is time for the war band to fulfill the vows 'we made by the highest Jupiter and the mighty ones above'.³¹ Jupiter's Scandinavian name is not readily apparent, although 'Óðinn' would be a likely candidate.³² Later in the sequence, the warrior Biarco uses another Roman name (Pluto) when he observes that the ruler of the underworld chooses only the nobles: 'Pluto does not drag off the lowly or obscure, the fallen of the commoners and mean souls, he clasps the deaths of the powerful and fills Phlegethon [a fiery river in the underworld] with notable characters.'³³ While there is no exact Old Norse counterpart to Pluto, Biarco's remark forms a partial parallel to Hárbarðr's statement in the vernacular *Hárbarðsljóð* (st. 24) that it is only the nobles who fall in battle who will be received by Óðinn,³⁴ and 'Pluto' may therefore be considered as a way of referring to Óðinn.

Finally, toward the end of the sequence, Óðinn is referred to three times using in turn a Latinized form of his vernacular name (Othin), a 'borrowed' Latin name (Mars), and a kenning-like periphrasis (the dreadful husband of Frigga³⁵):

'And now, where is he whom people call Othin the warlike ...'
 'if you wish without danger to see Mars present ...'
 'If I could see Frigga's dreadful husband ...'³⁶

This series of examples, then, shows how both Latin and Latinized Norse names for the Scandinavian deities are used in a single poetic sequence and perhaps even that Óðinn in a single sequence may be referred to using the names of no fewer than three Roman deities (Jupiter, Pluto, and Mars). The characterization of Othin as 'the warlike' (*armipotens*) further illustrates how the variance extends beyond the mere names, as this is an epithet connected with Mars in Virgil's *Aeneid* (9.717), Saxo's principal model when it comes to poetic expressions and phrasing.³⁷ The logical conclusion to draw from this mixing and matching of Scandinavian and Latin tradition is that the Norse and the Roman gods are identical. Saxo, however, insists that the similarity has arisen because the gods venerated by the Scandinavians usurped the names and the cult of the deities of the classical world.

Saxo's accounts of the two exiles of Othinus illustrate in a more detailed manner how the traditional gods of the Scandinavians operate within the doctrinal framework he has presented. Although neither account has a direct counterpart in the vernacular mythological corpus, the basic pattern of absence, expropriation, and recovery is paralleled in *Ynglinga saga*, and Óðinn's wanderlust is well known.³⁸

The story of the first exile illustrates how Othinus is, for all his authority and wizardry, unable to protect a golden statue that has been made in his honor. In the days of King Hadingus, Saxo tells us, a certain Othinus was venerated as a god throughout Europe, although he spent most of his time in Uppsala.³⁹ The Scandinavian kings had, as a token of the reverence in which they held him, collectively financed a golden statue of him and sent it to Byzantium, where the gods, whose leader he was, had their headquarters (cf. 3.4.9). The statue is set up for public worship, and, with the help of his remarkable skills (*mira artis industria*, 1.7.1), Othinus imbues his effigy with the power of speech.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, his covetous wife Frigga turns the symbol of his divine honor into a monument of shame when she persuades a servant to despoil the effigy of its gold in return for sexual favors. Disgraced, Othinus goes into a voluntary exile and only returns to reclaim his former position after Frigga's death.

In this episode, Saxo deftly varies a hagiographic commonplace with biblical origins that one finds in innumerable accounts of encounters between missionaries/evangelizers and idols. Such tales normally stress the impotence of the idol by highlighting its inability to protect itself against

the hostile missionary wishing to overthrow it.⁴¹ The basic argument, which the hagiographies rarely fail to make, is that a god/idol that cannot even protect itself is unlikely to be able to protect its worshipper. Of course no missionary is present in Saxo's account of the intrigues at the divine Byzantine court, but Frigga does an equally good job exposing the futility of putting one's trust in an idol. Saxo furthermore does not fail to take advantage of this opportunity to pass elaborate antithetical judgment on Frigga and her exalted husband: Although she was unworthy of a divine spouse, a divinity like Othinus was worthy of such as wife.⁴²

Othinus' second exile is a downright banishment. It follows upon his efforts to sire an avenger after Baldrus' death on an uncooperative Russian princess by the name of Rinda (3.4). When the gods in Byzantium had learned how their leader Othinus demeaned himself in order to secure this goal, they dethroned him and expelled him from their community, fearing that their communal veneration would suffer because of the ignominious deeds of their leader. In Othinus' absence, a certain Ollerus (whose name indicates that he is somehow equivalent to the obscure ON divinity Ullr) was exalted to the position of leadership, granted divine status, and had the name of Othinus bestowed upon him. After ten years, the gods take pity on the old (or former) Othinus and invite him back to Byzantium, so Ollerus is expelled.

It appears from this account that 'Othinus' is not only a name but also a title of divinity that can be bestowed on any suitable candidate.⁴³ If the possessor of the title at a given time did not, for whatever reason, live up to the expectations of the divine council, they would drive him out and exalt a new Othinus. A series of Othinuses (or Othini), such as this, would explain the continued presence of (an) Othinus throughout the first nine books of Saxo's work. The Byzantine board of gods may work in a similar way, although the rank-and-file members are rather anonymous; they act as a unanimous collective not as individuals and their names are never revealed.⁴⁴

A detail which supports this hypothesized replaceability of the gods in the Byzantine council is found in the account of the interregnum during Othinus' first exile. In the course of his absence, Othinus' position was usurped by a certain wizard, known by the curious name of Mithothyn.⁴⁵ Like Othinus, he claimed divine veneration. He even reformed the worship of the gods, demanding that sacrifices be made to the gods individually rather than as a collective group,⁴⁶ and, so it appears, reorganized the divine council.⁴⁷ Upon his return after Frigga's death, Othinus sent Mithothyn packing along with his following of parvenu gods and, we may assume, reconstituted the divine council with himself at the helm.

All the autoeuhemerizing mortals on the divine board in Byzantium are, then, occasionally replaced, like their chairman who carries the title 'Othinus'. This divine council and their leader often act as a single body, but tensions may arise.

The Upper Story

Although Saxo on the whole despoils the deities of the ancient Scandinavians of their titles, he does leave some space in his narrative for supernatural agents that operate at a higher level than the human. These agents rarely appear as actors on the narrative stage, but one can often register their presence through the utterances of Saxo's ordinary human characters.

Some such references could be dismissed as examples of the misguided and unenlightened religious views of the ancient Scandinavians. It would, however, be rash to dismiss them all out of hand, and Saxo often let such references stand without attempting to undercut them by exposing their erroneous nature. As examples of such passages, one could mention the many references to the Fates or an indefinite group of gods (often referred to as *superi* 'those above').⁴⁸ References to both these entities can be found in a part of Bessus' laudatory poem about how Gram, his master and the future Danish king, put to death the Swedish king Sigtrugus, whom iron could not harm, with a gold club: 'Pursuing the Fates and the plan of those above, he overcame the glory of powerless Sweden, when he dealt death to the king and crushed him with the stiff [club of] gold.'⁴⁹

One may of course hold the view that Saxo's failure to undermine these references to divinities and the Fates directly by reasserting the doctrine of autoeuhemerization does not in any way enhance their reality or authenticity, but such supernatural agents were a central feature in the classical pagan works he strove to imitate and emulate. Furthermore, there are cracks in Saxo's edifice that occasionally allow us to glimpse a reality different from the one that is described and demarcated in his dogmatic sections.

There are some indications that he acknowledged the efficacy of the characters whom the Scandinavians venerated as gods. They are occasionally shown to possess the kind of powers one would expect of gods, in particular the ability to exercise control over the weather.⁵⁰ Two examples will be presented of this. The first is an etiological story that explains how the famous Frøblod 'Frø sacrifice' at Uppsala originated (I.8.II–12). At one point, Hadingus kills a 'marine monster of an unknown kind' which turns out to be 'one of the gods in disguise'.⁵¹ All sorts of disasters

befall Hadingus because of this; his fleet sinks, houses collapse as he enters them, etc. His fortunes do not improve before he propitiates the gods by sacrificing an unspecified number of black oxen to Frø (the name is equivalent to the ON theonym Freyr). Another account tells how King Gormo, on his way back from an adventurous expedition to the realm of Geruthus beyond the sun and the stars in the far north, suffered innumerable perils at sea and how most of his crew died of starvation. In response, he

turned to worship and sought refuge in promises made to those above, judging that protection in his extreme need was in the hands of the gods. Then as others were praying to various divine forces and thinking that sacrifices should be made to diverse godly powers, he himself approached Utgarthilocus with promises as well as offerings, and gained the favorable weather for which he had hoped.⁵²

These two examples show that the traditional gods of the Scandinavians did possess some superhuman abilities that approached those of a true divinity, and among other things were able to control the forces of the winds. One may question the nature of the superhuman inventions into the lives of Hadingus and Gormo at this point and argue that the false divinities do not in fact do good, but that they simply refrain from doing evil; that they brought tribulations down upon Hadingus and Gormo and that they, when propitiated, abstained from causing further harm. This argument, which exposes the euergetism of false gods as false, is often encountered in medieval hagiographic literature,⁵³ but there is no indication that such an argument should be read into Saxo's text. To be sure, the first example shows gods doing harm and later refraining from doing harm, but this is because they are (rightfully) angered by the murder of one among their number, not because of an inherent desire to become the recipients of human worship.

Yet, the most revealing passage when it comes to the reality and divinity of the pagan gods in Saxo's text is found in one of his authorial comments to his own narrative. In particular in the early part of his work, Saxo often advances to the forefront of his text and lets the authorial persona inform us about his opinions on various matters. One example is found in the context of his account of Hadingus' journey to the Netherworld. One evening during his prolonged stay at the residence of a Norwegian king, Hadingus saw a woman popping out of the ground. She held various kinds of fresh herbs in her arms and as Hadingus was eager to learn where one might find fresh plants like these in the middle of winter, she wrapped her cloak around him and together they disappeared down into the ground.

The unnamed woman took Hadingus on a tour of the Otherworld where he saw a bridge, noble persons clad in purple, a *locus amoenus* where herbs grew and the sun shone, and two hosts of men engaged in eternal combat. Finally they come to a high wall which they are unable to pass. They kill a cock and toss it over the wall. Shortly thereafter, they hear the cock crowing and conclude that the dead are reborn on the other side of the wall. This account bears some striking resemblances to medieval accounts of journeys through the Christian Otherworld, but in this context it is Saxo's interpretation of the significance of the account that is particularly remarkable.⁵⁴ 'I think', he pronounces, 'that it was the infernal gods that had decided that he should be brought as a living person to these places, which he will be headed towards when he dies.'⁵⁵ This comment is not made by a pagan whom clever magicians or demons have led into a false faith, nor is it an illustration of the false religion of the Byzantine wizards. It is the learned and well-informed author himself (or at least his authorial persona) who makes a pronouncement that we cannot help but take at face value about the gods of the Netherworld. Saxo, in spite of his avowed euhemeristic model, here allows for infernal gods supplementing the one worshipped by Christians. In the tradition of vision literature on which Saxo probably drew when describing the Otherworld visited by Hadingus, it is typically God that decides whether living persons should be taken on journeys through the beyond before their time has come. Saxo, adapting this framework to a Scandinavian pre-Christian context, lets the 'infernal gods' play this part.

However, this passage is also one of the innumerable instances in which Saxo uses collocations borrowed from silver age Latin authors. The apparatus of sources or parallel passages that accompanies the edition of Saxo's text shows that in this instance, as in so many others, Saxo is imitating his favorite literary models and has partly borrowed the wording from Valerius Maximus or Justinus.⁵⁶ Although the phrases are found in somewhat different contexts in the works of Valerius and Justinus, they clearly illustrate how Saxo's attempt at balancing conflicting traditions, doctrines, and conventions induces him to include a nebulous group of gods, who possess real divine agency, in addition to the false divinities that go under the names of Óðinn, Þórr, etc. The result is a two-layer model in which the existence of multiple gods is rejected and taken for granted at the same time.

Saxo's physical theology is not a neat theology where one answer to the question of the origin of the cult of pagan gods in Scandinavia is clearly and consistently mapped out. His fundamental and most explicit model appears to be that of the autoeuhemerizing wizards who mainly dwell in

Byzantium, but frequently travel back and forth between Byzantium and Scandinavia. While he leaves no doubt about the falsity of these deities, their cult appears to be efficacious and the Scandinavian worshippers who call upon them are helped in their troubles. Saxo also reserves the full battery of polemical tropes that had been developed over the centuries to expose the pagan gods and idolatry, for the cult of the Wends. In addition to the named gods, Saxo's historiographical Latin models impelled him to include references to an indistinct collective of unnamed deities and Fates that appears to have exerted real power over the unfolding of history in Scandinavia. Reference is not only made to these forces by the characters of Saxo's narrative, but even by the learned author himself, who occasionally appears to acknowledge their existence.

Gods and Humans in the Prose Edda

The physical theology of the North reaches an apex with the Snorronic writings of the early thirteenth century, the *Prose Edda* – particularly its prologue (here referred to as *Prologus*) and *Gylfaginning*, ‘The Fooling of Gylfi’, its first major section – and *Ynglinga saga*, ‘The Saga of the Ynglings’, the first saga in the *Heimskringla* compilation of kings’ sagas.¹ Both texts present accounts of the origin of disbelief in the North within the framework of a migration myth in which the future deities are mere humans who migrate from Asia to northern Europe. Once they have arrived in the North, they secure kingships for themselves and are eventually venerated as gods because of the cultural advances they bring and their ability to secure peace and prosperity. The migration myth is basically euhemeristic in that it claims that the gods of the pagans originally were humans.² The euhemeristic understanding of the Norse pagan gods has also been encountered in the previous chapters and appears to have been a ubiquitous explanation for the existence of pagan gods favored by authors writing on this topic in medieval Scandinavia.³ Nevertheless, in a series of innovative studies – most recently ‘Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie: Euhemerismus oder Analogie?’ of 2014 – Heinrich Beck has taken the position that there is no euhemerism in the Snorronic writings. In its stead, he proposes a model in which analogies between Northern paganism and Christian doctrine have an ennobling effect on the Scandinavian tradition.⁴ Beck, who attributes this remarkable analogous interpretation of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion to the genius of Snorri Sturluson, argues that analogy between Norse mythology and Christian teaching precludes a euhemeristic interpretation: ‘Wenn Snorri dem Euhemerismus anhing, konnte er keine Analogie zwischen der überlieferten Mythologie und der christlichen Lehre vertreten haben – und umgekehrt!’⁵ Beck’s positive valorization of Snorri’s attitude toward Scandinavian mythology echoes some earlier scholarship, particularly that of Dronke and Dronke and Faulkes, but his emphasis on analogy and the rejection of euhemerism is a new development.⁶ Beck’s

work stands in marked contrast to the claim that Snorri's presentation of the mythic material rested on a euhemeristic and demonological understanding of the mythology, which was advanced by Holtsmark in her now classic *Studier i Snorres mytologi* of 1964. Scholarship has not taken Beck's arguments up for discussion or indeed endorsed them to a great extent. The main exception is Jan Alexander van Nahl, who in a monograph entitled *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie und die mittelalterliche Theologie* of 2013 has endeavored to further Beck's thinking and to demonstrate how the concept of analogy is fundamental to the *Prose Edda*.⁷ In it, van Nahl argues that 'Snorri folgte in seinem Werk einem Analogiekonzept, das nordischen Polytheismus und Christentum in Relation zueinander setzte, die eine systematische Aufwertung der vorchristlichen Religion implizierte.'⁸ Like Beck, he rejects the euhemeristic interpretation of the Snorronic writings.⁹

The following will argue the case for euhemerism and take up the place of analogical thinking in the *Prose Edda* for critical consideration. However, in agreement with Beck, van Nahl, and others, it will also be argued that demonology has no place in the *Prose Edda* or *Ynglinga saga*. The writers of these works endeavored to present the pre-Christian gods as sympathetically as possible, although they were unable (and probably also unwilling) to let go of the idea that non-Christian religion ultimately rested on distortions of the true faith and falsehoods. Most discussions of the *Prose Edda* take their point of departure in editions based on the *Codex Regius* (R, c. 1300–50) of the *Prose Edda*, and the first part of this chapter will follow suit. In an article on the *Codex Upsaliensis* (U, c. 1300–25) version of the *Prose Edda*, Beck nevertheless shows that studies of individual versions of the Edda can be well worth the effort.¹⁰ In this spirit, the chapter will therefore conclude with a discussion of *Prologus* as it is found in *Codex Wormianus* (W, c. 1350). It will be argued that this version, which is roughly twice as long as the standard version (i.e. the R version), actively seeks to undermine the positive portrayal of the primordial pagans given by the standard version.

Interpretations and Valorizations

Beck finds the impulse to analogic thinking that in his view pervades *Gylfaginning* in the second of the constitutions issued from the Fourth Lateran Council (held in 1215), namely that 'between creator and creature no similarity can be observed without observing an even greater dissimilarity'.¹¹ The Norwegian archbishop Guðormr (r. 1214–24), who may have participated in the Lateran Council, has been singled out as

a possible route of transmission for this notion of analogy.¹² Beck and van Nahl's analogic understanding of *Gylfaginning* and the remaining Snorronic writings rests on a series of parallels between the Snorronic writings and Christian scripture. Some of these parallels are well known to scholarship and have generally been accepted. Therefore the discussion has not focused on the identification of such parallels or on whether they are accidental or intended but on the interpretation and valorization of the parallels. The two fundamentally different positions are whether the parallels should be interpreted *in malo* or *in bono*. The best-known parallel, which will also be the focus of the following, is the parallel between *Gylfaginning's* Odinic triad (consisting of Hár, Jafnhár, and Priði) and the Holy Trinity.¹³ Here Beck's positive valorization is the exact antithesis of the negative view espoused by Holtsmark in her 1964 study. By contrasting Holtsmark's view of *Gylfaginning's* so-called Óðinn theology¹⁴ with that of Beck, it will be seen that the valorization is mainly determined by the perspective or interpretive framework brought to the text by the scholar. Gylfi has asked who the most eminent and oldest of the gods is. The Óðinn triad explains that Alfǫðr 'All-Father' created heaven and earth and all that they contain, lives through all ages, and governs everything, large as well as small. When Gylfi then asks what this Alfǫðr did before he had created heaven and earth, he receives the answer that Alfǫðr stayed with the frost-giants.¹⁵ The triad's answer contains a series of reminiscences of Christian doctrine,¹⁶ but these are ultimately undercut by a statement that is not easily reconciled with it, namely that the all-powerful creator god dwelled among frost-giants before his acts of creation. Holtsmark, who attaches greater importance to the dissimilarities between the Christian and Norse creator gods than to their similarities, characterizes the technique that she sees employed in *Gylfaginning* by the phrase 'association through contrast' ('assosiasjon ved kontrast').¹⁷ The disparities between the Norse and the Christian All-Father are further highlighted by her equation of the frost-giants with the denizens of hell. This leads her to characterize the Óðinn theology as nothing less than a creed of the devil and a diabolic heterodoxy.¹⁸ The totality of these similarities and dissimilarities amounts to an inversion of Christian theology, an ungodly perversion of the Christian faith presented by Óðinn, who is none other than the devil.¹⁹ Beck, on the other hand, attaches greater importance to the similarities and sees the final remark about the creator god and the frost giants as a confirmation of dissimilarity that has been dutifully added in order to stress that the Christian and the Norse creator gods are not completely identical after all.²⁰

Holtsmark's and Beck's interpretations are determined by their differing overarching views on the theological and interpretive frameworks within which *Prologus* and *Gylfaginning* (and in Beck's case also *Ynglinga saga*) should be understood. Where Holtsmark saw euhemerism and demonology, Beck sees analogy. Although all three interpretive modes are valid as medieval approaches through which one can understand pre-Christian myth, they are not necessarily appropriate in the specific context of the *Prose Edda* if one's aim is to reach a historical understanding of the text and to uncover, if possible, the intentions of those who produced it. Although the *Prose Edda* contains no direct statements concerning the larger interpretive framework its author(s) intended, it is possible to locate text-internal indicators that point in a euhemeristic direction (see below). The evidence for demonological and analogical interpretations, on the other hand, remains text-external, and it is therefore debatable whether they are germane to the text as we now know it.²¹

Demonology

A demonological interpretive framework has often been applied to the *Prose Edda*. Prominent representatives for this direction of scholarship include Holtsmark and Weber.²² In spite of their demonological perspective, both scholars readily acknowledge that there are no direct and overt references to demons or demonology in the *Prose Edda*. Weber explains this absence by arguing that Gylfi, as well as the earthly Æsir, were ignorant of the true (demonic) nature of the divine Æsir²³ – an argument that appears to presuppose that the narrator of *Gylfaginning* only relates what is known to the characters of the frame narrative. If this were the case, both Gylfi and the Óðinn triad have all been deceived by demons. Interestingly, Weber also suggests that the head that floats behind the triad of Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði in a well-known illustration from *Codex Upsaliensis* of the *Prose Edda* is a devil's head ('ein Teufelskopf').²⁴ If this were indeed a devil's head, it would give the illustration a key role in decoding *Gylfaginning*, and the devil could then be seen secretly inspiring the triad, unbeknownst to the triad itself. It must, however, be admitted that the head in question does not appear to be a part of the original composition and seems to be drawn in a very different style.²⁵

In the absence of direct references to demonology, the argument for the relevance of a demonological interpretation rests by necessity on text-external, contextual evidence, and this is the path Holtsmark and Weber take. Holtsmark first argues that the demonological explanation was well



Figure 5.1 Gangleri and the Óðinn triad, Uppsala, DG II 26v
(Uppsala University Library)

known in the North at the time when the *Prose Edda* was written. She draws particularly on *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, the text to which [Chapter 3](#) was devoted, in which demonology plays an important role. There can be no doubt that the demonological interpretive strategy was well known in the North at the time, as the series of examples of demonization of

Óðinn and other gods, given in [Chapter 1](#), showed. Yet, although it is often encountered, it is by no means obligatory, and neither of the texts discussed in [Chapters 2](#) and [4](#) of this volume activates demonology as an interpretive framework.

In addition to the contextual evidence, Holtsmark's demonological interpretation draws on the vocabulary employed in *Gylfaginning*. She attaches particular importance to the adjective *ffolkunnigr* 'having magical abilities, lit. much-knowing' and the corresponding abstract noun *ffolkyngr* 'magic' and considers them key terms that should guide our understanding of the text.²⁶ She therefore launches into a discussion of the semantics of these terms as they are reflected in texts contemporary with the *Prose Edda*.²⁷ While there can be little doubt that Holtsmark is correct in stating that the terms are most often used in a pejorative sense and *ffolkyngr* is often presented as the antithesis of Christianity (i.e., as witchcraft or sorcery rather than as magic), she fails to point out that the *Prose Edda*, generally speaking, does not make use of these terms when speaking about the *Æsir*.²⁸ The terms *ffolkunnigr* and *ffolkyngr* are used on a handful of occasions in the *Prose Edda*, but it is noteworthy that they are mainly applied to characters who are presented as adversaries of the gods or whose relation to the gods is indeterminate. The characters that are either characterized as *ffolkunnigar* or said to work *ffolkyngr* are Gylfi, *Ægir*, *Útgardaloki*, *Hildir*, who caused the *Hjaðningavíg*, *Ívaldi's* sons, i.e., the dwarfs that forged *Skiðblaðnir*, and finally *Hreiðmarr*, the father of *Fáfnir* and *Reginn*, who successfully managed to obtain compensation from the three gods who had accidentally killed one of his sons.²⁹ Since it is primarily characters whose relationship with the *Æsir* is antagonistic or indifferent who are characterized by Holtsmark's 'key term', it can hardly be as significant a characteristic of the *Æsir* as she claimed.

This realization does not mean that the *Æsir* are not associated with magic. They are, after all, able to conjure up the *sjónhverfingar* 'ocular delusions' with which they attempt to fool Gylfi, giving rise to the title of *Gylfaginning* 'The Fooling of Gylfi'.³⁰ However, the word *ginning* 'fooling' does not appear to have particular diabolic connotations or to have been associated with witchcraft.³¹ It is more difficult to give *sjónhverfing* a positive spin. Perusal of the materials made available by the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP) shows that most of the attestations of *sjónhverfing* describe devilish illusions and are found in texts with obvious Christian themes.³² The earthly *Æsir's* *sjónhverfingar* do not, however, appear particularly devilish when looked at in isolation or when compared to those conjured up by *Útgardaloki* when *Pórr* visits him on one of his journeys

to giant-land.³³ Scholarship has often highlighted the correspondence between the Þórr-adventure, ‘Þórs^ginning’ as it were, and Gylfi’s experiences.³⁴ In both cases the ocular delusions that befall the protagonists are characterized as *sjónhverfingar*. In both cases the illusions disappear at a stroke, and both Gylfi and Þórr find themselves on a level field.³⁵ A close parallel in Saxo Grammaticus’ version of the Baldr narrative has been noted less often, although it is by no means unknown. Having lost his way in the forest, Hotherus (who corresponds to the ON Hǫðr) comes upon a group of forest maidens (*siluestres uirgines*) who claim that they are often invisibly present at battlefields and have the ability to determine the outcomes of battles. These forest maidens, who thus partly function as valkyries (*valkyrjur*) do in vernacular Old Norse texts, advise Hotherus not to confront Balderus (ON Baldr) in traditional battle, since Balderus is a demigod (and presumably impervious to conventional weapons). Having said this, their dwelling disappears, and Hotherus finds himself in the open air:

Having heard this, Hotherus, deprived of the covering of the vanishing shelter, suddenly noticed that he was abandoned under the open sky and deserted in the middle of a field without any shelter. In particular, he wondered at the sudden disappearance of the girls and the versatile site and the deceptive appearance of the building. For he did not know that what had happened around him was pure mockery and a hollow fabrication of deceitful arts. Returning thence, he told Gevarus the entire story of his wandering astray and the ensuing mockery.³⁶

Comparing this fairly dense paragraph with the conclusions of *Gylfaginning*’s frame narrative and the story of Þórr’s sojourn at Útgardaloki’s court, three key features turn out to be common to these accounts: first, the structure visited by the protagonist is characterized as an illusion. Second, it vanishes suddenly, leaving the protagonist under an open sky. Finally, the protagonist returns to his place of origin and recounts his experiences.³⁷ Saxo’s characteristic propensity to present a statement and then rephrase it a couple of times presents him with the opportunity to describe the illusion conjured up by the forest maidens in various ways. It is particularly noteworthy that the phrase ‘deceptive (or ‘false’) appearance of the building’ (*fallax aedis imago*), which is used to characterize the place where the forest maidens receive Hotherus, closely parallels the *sjónhverfingar* of Útgardaloki and the earthly Æsir. Furthermore, Saxo’s designation of Hotherus’ entire experience as a *ludificatio* ‘mockery’ clearly parallels the *ginning* of Gylfi,³⁸ and the two terms are functionally equivalent. In the [previous chapter](#), it was shown that Saxo freely drew on the rhetoric of demonization when it came to the description of the

Wend gods but eschewed this strategy in his treatment of the traditional Norse gods, although they are portrayed as somewhat dubious characters. A similar tendency can be observed in his treatment of the forest maidens. Although they are morally ambivalent characters and Saxo appears to find their magic abilities unsettling, they are helpful rather than demonic. Hotherus is the hero of Saxo's Baldr story, and he would have been unable to defeat Baldr had the forest maidens not advised him. Seeing them as a demonic force of evil therefore does not accurately reflect Saxo's ostensible position on the matter.

Taken together, these points weaken the position that the *Prose Edda* should be understood from a demonological perspective. Holtsmark is therefore overstating her case when she concludes that 'the *ginning* is a pagan revelation, a revelation of *ffjölkyngi*'.³⁹

Analogy

The precise implications of the concept of analogy are more difficult to grasp than those of demonology, but Beck's basic claim – that a set of analogies between Christian and Norse teachings has an ennobling effect on Norse myth – is clear enough. The suggestion that Snorri Sturluson, whom Beck considers the originator of the analogical analysis of Norse myth, was inspired by one of the constitutions issued from the Fourth Lateran Council (held in 1215) is within the realm of possibility, since the *Prose Edda* is conventionally dated to the 1220s. It is, however, impossible to substantiate, and Snorri's part in the shaping of the various texts of the *Prose Edda* as they have come down to us is likewise difficult to determine with certainty (see n. 1). It must also be admitted that although the dictum of the Fourth Lateran Council, 'between creator and creature no similarity can be observed without observing an even greater dissimilarity',⁴⁰ has a general character and therefore may be applicable under many different circumstances, it is not found in a discussion of myth or pre-Christian religion but as a part of a condemnation of Joachim of Fiore's denunciation of Peter the Lombard's teaching on the Trinity. Despite these complications, the general thesis that analogies between Norse myth and Christian teaching add dignity to the former is well worth discussing, in particular since it forms a counterpoint to Holtsmark's inverse, demonological interpretation of many of the same analogies. Beck sees the Óðinn-theology, discussed in the previous section, as one among a number of analogues but attaches particular importance to a new analogy, which he has uncovered at the conclusion

of the frame narrative of *Gylfaginning*.⁴¹ Here the earthly Æsir adopt the names of the characters they have told Gylfi about so that ‘when long times passed, people should not doubt that they were one, those Æsir [i.e. the divine] about whom stories were told and these Æsir [i.e. the earthly] who then were given the same names’.⁴² This, Beck argues, should be seen as analogous to Jesus’s pronouncement ‘I and the Father, we are one’ (John 10:30),⁴³ which he utters as he is confronted by a group of hostile detractors looking for an excuse to stone him. According to Beck, this proclamation is so unusual that the conclusion that there is an analogous relation between the Gospel of John and *Gylfaginning* is almost unavoidable.⁴⁴ Even if one agrees that there is a similarity between *Gylfaginning* and the Gospel of John at this point, it should be mentioned that it is not such a rare occurrence in the history of religion that humans claim identity with the godhead. The example of Simon Magus must have been well known to some audiences in medieval Iceland. Simon only made a single appearance in the Bible (Acts 8:5–25), but on this basis, he came to personify not only simony but also arrogance and heresy. In medieval literature, he is often presented as a false god *par excellence*.⁴⁵ In *Petrus saga postula* I, the saga that devotes the most attention to Simon Magus, both Simon and his followers repeatedly claim that he is God: e.g., ‘This same Simon ... was so deranged that he believed he was God and dared furthermore by falsehood and lies to call himself God, promising those who believed in him that he would grant them eternal life.’⁴⁶ Another example is the Persian king Khosroe (Khosrow II), who in arrogance ‘thought himself God’ and built a glass sky, ingeniously outfitted with hidden pipes, through which he made it rain.⁴⁷

The declaration of identity is one among many perceived parallels between Christian teaching and *Gylfaginning*, but Beck attaches particular importance to it. In doing so, Beck and van Nahl, who follows him in many respects, run into a difficulty similar to that of Holtsmark and Weber when they emphasized the importance of demonology for the understanding of the *Prose Edda*: The text does not contain any clear pronouncement on how the analogies should be valorized. Furthermore, the mainstream tradition represented by the manuscripts RTW explicitly states that the stories Gylfi heard were, to a certain extent, fabrications.⁴⁸ U also clearly express that the earthly Æsir were not in fact identical with the divine Æsir when it has Hár relate to Gylfi that Burr’s sons (Óðinn, Vili, and Vé), built a city in the middle of the world, settled down there, and that their descendants, ‘from whom our family has descended’, dwelt there.⁴⁹ So while Christianity teaches that the Father and the Son are in fact one,

the earthly Æsir merely desire to persuade Gylfi's compatriots that they are identical to the divine Æsir by adopting their names.

Analogical reasoning is by no means absent from the text. In particular, it fulfills an important function in *Prologus*. In the time between the Deluge and the dispersal of humankind over the face of the earth, the prologue explains, humankind contemplated the nature of things. They detected a set of correspondences between the earth on which they lived and living beings and wondered what to make of them: 'They considered this and wondered why it was so that the earth and the animals and the birds had a shared nature in some respects and yet differed in kind.'⁵⁰ Beck sees this statement with its emphasis on dissimilarity in similarity as a clear indication of the influence from the Fourth Lateran Council's statement on the relationship between creator and creature.⁵¹ Yet this example of analogical reasoning should not be seen as an analogue to Christian thinking. It is not intended to illuminate the relationship between the biblical Creator and his creation but between the earth and its fauna, represented by 'animals and birds'.⁵² Table 5.1 lists the correspondences shown in the prologue.

Analogical reasoning works by observing correspondences between two domains (in this case 'earth' and 'fauna'). Given a sufficient number of relevant correspondences, one infers that what is true of the one domain is also true of the other. In this particular case, the commonalities led early

Table 5.1 *Correspondences between earth and fauna in Prologus*

	Earth	Fauna
1 pair	(a) Water is found beneath the surface of the earth. (b) The distance from the surface of the earth to water is constant, no matter whether one digs on a mountaintop or in a valley.	(a) Blood is found under the skin of animals/birds. (b) The distance from the surface of the skin to blood is the same on the head and feet of the animals/birds.
2 pair	(a) Plants and flowers spring from the earth each year. (b) In the same year, plants and flowers wither and fall.	(a) Hair and feathers grow on animals/birds each year. (b) In the same year, the animals/birds shed or molt.
(3 'pair')	When one digs into the earth and turns it over, grass will grow on the soil that is on top.	<i>Prologus fails to offer a faunal parallel here.</i>
4 pair	Rocks and stones.	Teeth and bones.

humans to reason that because the animals/birds are alive, the earth must also be 'alive and have life of some kind'.⁵³ Encouraged by this conclusion, early humans further reasoned that since the earth gave life to and fed all things, they themselves must also originate from the earth. Humankind thus traced its origin to the earth and gave it a name. *Prologus* does not reveal which name they give the earth, but since the governing notion is that of motherhood and the earth is referred to as *hon* 'she', it should most likely be conceived of as '(Mother) Earth'.⁵⁴ As far as one can tell, the notion of a Mother Earth was not central to pre-Christian Norse myth and religion. Tacitus provided some, albeit problematic, evidence for this idea among some speakers of Germanic languages around 100 CE when he identified the goddess Nerthus as Mother Earth.⁵⁵ Þórr is also said to be the 'son of Earth', but Earth it- or herself does not have any independent agency in the preserved sources of Norse myth.⁵⁶ When the author of *Prologus* attributes a maternal status to the earth, he therefore appears to draw on medieval learned tradition rather than on inherited Norse materials. In the learned tradition, one can find general parallels to the notion of a Mother Earth as well as parallels to some of the analogues listed above.⁵⁷

An additional, more oblique, example of analogical reasoning follows immediately upon the first in *Prologus*. It takes the form of a version of the argument from design for the existence of God. Having reached their conclusion about the nature of the earth/Earth, early humankind turns its eyes toward the sky. They notice the regularity of the movements of the celestial bodies and conclude that the stars, sun, and moon must be governed by someone who is both mighty and powerful. As this governor controls the rising and setting of the sun, he also rules over the growth of the soil and ultimately over the livelihood of all living beings. The prologue states that they name the governor, but yet again, the text refrains from mentioning the name. It is reasonable to assume that the unmentioned name would have been 'All-Father' (an equivalent to ON *alfrǫðr*) or something similar.⁵⁸ There are two reasons for this: Firstly, this name forms a parallel to 'Mother Earth'⁵⁹ and secondly the name 'All-Father' refers later on in *Gylfaginning* to a god who 'lives throughout all ages and rules his entire kingdom, and governs all things, great and small'.⁶⁰ It should, however, be noted that only a few of the aspects of *Gylfaginning's* All-Father are paralleled by the Governor of the prologue. The unwillingness of the text to present the names of Mother Earth and All-Father probably has to do with the author's subsequent point that the names given by early man have changed to such a degree in the course of time (or as a consequence

of the events at Babel, as W has it), that the original names are no longer knowable (see below).

The argument for the existence of an all-powerful deity commonly known as the argument from design or the teleological argument still enjoys some popularity today in creationist circles. It is found widely, but not exclusively, in Western tradition from antiquity onwards. Plato (d. 348/347 BCE) and Xenophon (d. 354 BCE) attribute versions of this argument to Socrates, in *Timaeus* and *Memorabilia*, respectively, and versions of the argument are also given by the deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom (see [Chapter 2](#)), the major church fathers, and various widely read medieval authors.⁶¹ Although the prologue does not make it explicit, the argument from design relies on analogical reasoning. If one sees an object in this world that appears to have a specific purpose, such as a bicycle, it is not unreasonable to assume that this object did not come about by coincidence but that there was a designer/maker who made it for that purpose.⁶² In the argument from design, the cosmos is seen as a parallel to human artifacts (although of a larger scale), and through analogical reasoning, one infers that because the human artifact has a maker, the cosmos must have one as well. The particular version of the argument from design in *Prologus*, however, differs from the common form of the argument in that the inferred agent is not said to have been the designer/maker of the ordered cosmos but rather the one who actively maintains and governs that order.

One may well find fault with the observations and analogical reasoning that, according to the *Prologus*, led to the inference of the existence of a Mother Earth and a Governor/All-Father. But this may have been the point, and the author of *Prologus* certainly also found fault with the conclusions reached by early humankind. He nevertheless describes their efforts with considerable sympathy.⁶³ He points out that they reached their conclusions about earth and the cosmos on the basis of their ‘earthly understanding’, which, although it is divinely granted, solely enabled them to understand earthly, observable things.⁶⁴ This distinction between a restricted earthly understanding and a more transcendental wisdom, which enables humankind to comprehend things that are hidden from plain sight, is also alluded to in the *apologia* that concludes the *fornaldarsaga Gøngu-Hrólf’s saga*.⁶⁵ In this passage, which may echo *Prologus*, the saga’s authorial voice defends himself against anticipated accusations of having exaggerated and falsified stories of old, concluding that: ‘It is also truthfully written that God has granted heathens, just as Christians, comprehension and understanding concerning earthly matters, in addition to surpassing valor, riches and

excellent looks'.⁶⁶ In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, it is the valor, riches, and good looks of ancient heroes that matter, and their understanding of earthly matters plays a less important role. The *Edda* prologue, on the other hand, stresses earthly understanding and makes the point that humankind made the most out of the gift it had been granted. Still, their intellectual limitations prevented them from arriving at conclusions that were in accordance with Christian doctrine. A natural consequence of this is that their cosmology diverges somewhat from Christian doctrine.

Early humankind deemed its insights worthy of preservation and embedded them in language through the names given to things. Unfortunately, language did not provide early humankind with the safeguard it had expected: 'This religion', the text reads, referring to the insights, 'has changed in many ways as people split up and languages branched.'⁶⁷ The importance of this sentence for the understanding of the prologue and *Gylfaginning* can hardly be overestimated. It accounts to a large extent for the dissimilarity between the insights of early humankind and the religion/mythology that is revealed to Gylfi in *Gylfaginning*. It will be seen later on in this chapter that the W text of *Prologus* connects the alterations of the insights of early humankind and the branching of languages with the biblical story of the fall of the Tower of Babel. It is possible that the Babylonian Confusion should be seen as a subtext for the standard version of *Prologus*,⁶⁸ but given the generally sympathetic attitude of the author toward early humankind, it is just as likely that the prologue refers to the Table of Nations (Gen. 10) that precedes the biblical account of the Babylonian Confusion in Genesis.⁶⁹ That passage presents a much more earthbound and pragmatic account of the rise of the different languages (and peoples from which they originate) as a consequence of migrations rather than through divine punishment, as in the Babel story. Whatever the case, the insights gained by early humankind with the help of their earthly understanding were diluted and transformed as a result of linguistic change (and migrations).

Prologus, then, provides us with examples of analogical reasoning and gives important pointers to how the readers should valorize the conclusions. They represent humankind's best attempt at arriving at an understanding of the cosmos, but without 'spiritual wisdom' and revelation, humankind was bound to fail. As time passes, linguistic change causes the conclusions to diverge even further from the truth. Had the original insights contained a germ of truth, it was now distorted to the extent that it can only be seen as a faint reflection. It is against this background laid out in *Prologus* that the possible analogies between Christian doctrine and

Norse myth should be seen. The correspondences therefore can be no more than relics of primordial, but also erroneous and now largely lost insights. This loss, furthermore, is a consequence of natural linguistic processes, not of demonic interference.

Yet the *Prose Edda* views Norse myth as more than a distant reflection of primordial insights, and it is at this point that euhemerism emerges as a positive quality. According to euhemeristic doctrine, the gods of the pagans were originally humans who were venerated as gods by their contemporaries and their posterity. When the focus is on the pagan cult, euhemerism and demonology are often seen as two sides of the same coin, and demons are said to inhabit the idols that the pagans have erected in honor of their false gods. In this way, the worship of idols strengthens the demons that thrive on human veneration. However, when the focus is shifted from the civic theology that is the cultic domain to the physical or mythic theology everything looks different. In this sphere, euhemerism subsists without active cult and hence without demonology. A clear example of this can be seen in conjunction with *Stjórn* I's retelling of the story of Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26). Around the same time that this story played out, *Stjórn* I explains, Phoroneus established new and better laws in Greece:

[Phoroneus'] sister Isis sailed to Egypt. She was such a wise woman that she taught the Egyptians those letters and that kind of writing which they knew not beforehand. She taught them about ploughing for seed and the growing of grains. Because of this, they called her Isis, which means 'earth' in their language. Earlier she had been called Juno as well as Jano, because the philosophers said that she was so to speak the door or entry of all women who married and became pregnant.⁷⁰ Now because of this she was counted among the gods in Egypt after her death.⁷¹

In spite of the explicitly religious nature of the text, *Stjórn* does not in any way present a critique of Isis at this point. On the contrary, she is said to be *klókr* 'wise' and described as a benefactress who introduced literacy and cultivation of the land among the Egyptians. In gratitude for the advances she brought them, the Egyptians deified her. Another example follows the account of Jacob's offspring (Gen. 29:31 to 30:24) in *Stjórn* I:

Around this time, in the days of that king which was called Ogyges, there was a great flood in that part of Greece which is called Achaia ... Then a maiden appeared by lake Tricon [i.e. Triton] whom the Greeks call Minerva. They say that she invented many kinds of arts, eminent understanding, and in particular all those things which are made out of wool. *Isidore*: Tricon was the name of a great lake in Africa by which it is said that she showed herself in the shape of a young woman, and because of this she is also

called Triconia. She was elevated to the number of the gods by the heathens because her descent and origin was unknown to all. And because they believed that reason and understanding of skills were granted to humankind by her, they said that she had been born from the very head of Jove.⁷²

Again the characterization of the pagan goddess is thoroughly positive. The two sources cited by *Stjórn* I (*Historia scholastica* and Isidore's *Etymologies*) present various views on where she was first seen, but they both agree that she advanced human culture significantly by introducing new skills. In gratitude, the pagans, who knew no better, deified their benefactor.

It is striking that these examples, which are entirely devoid of demonology, come from the enlarged Old Norse translation of the first part of the Pentateuch, *Stjórn* I. This text is, however, in line with other euhemeristic accounts that circulated widely in the Middle Ages. Additional examples can be found Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. This work of the early eighth century was highly esteemed in the Middle Ages, and it can be considered the most influential piece of encyclopedic writing. In the eighth book of this work, entitled *De ecclesia et sectis* 'On the church and the sects', Isidore presents a relatively comprehensive euhemeristic interpretation of the classical gods, beginning: 'Those whom the pagans call gods are said to have been humans once and each of them began to be venerated after their death because of their life and merits.'⁷³ The merits highlighted by Isidore resemble those mentioned by *Stjórn* I (which partly derive from Isidore), including the invention of various arts and the founding of cities. Against this background, it may be said that the persons who were elevated to the status of godheads were benefactors rather than evil or demonic characters. They were culture heroes whose deeds advanced humankind.

Returning to the *Prose Edda*, the cultural advances brought to Scandinavia by the Asians are clear. The migration story tells how the Asians migrate northwards from Troy. They are good and beautiful, and they bring many wondrous things. The word of their magnificence precedes them, and they bring peace and prosperity wherever they go. They are so excellent that the peoples of the North voluntarily subject themselves to them. In this way, the Asians become kings of the North. They settle in Sigtúnir, where they build a new Troy and introduce Trojan laws. As time passes, the Northerners even adopt the language of the Trojans. The *Prose Edda* is not in any way disapproving of the Asians; they civilize the Northern lands, just as Isis brought civilization to Egypt.

Poetry is a second important element of Isidore's euhemeristic interpretation of the pagan gods. Culture-advancing benefactions do not automatically result in apotheosis. Someone needs to sing the praises of

the benefactors. Poets therefore play an important role in the process as well.⁷⁴ Isidore lists a series of gods of antiquity and continues: 'The poets increased the praises of them [the benefactors] and raised them to heaven in the songs they composed.'⁷⁵ An example of this is Prometheus, who, Isidore writes, invented the art of making clay statues. In itself this may be considered a meritorious deed, but in the aggrandizing hands of the poets, Prometheus becomes the creator of humans, rather than of representations of humans.⁷⁶ Further on, Isidore explains that 'the task of the poets is in the transference of those things that really have taken place into other forms by oblique representations, somehow transformed in a pleasing manner'.⁷⁷ Because of this, the poets do not tell truths but 'false stories' and 'fabulous inventions'.⁷⁸ The compositions of the poets, then, are meant to be understood in a figurative sense, but as time passes they are taken literally. Thus Prometheus, the inventor of the art of statue-making, becomes the fashioner of man, and Minerva, a figure associated with wisdom and crafts but of unknown parentage, is said to have sprung from the head of Jupiter, intellect being considered to reside in the brain.

Returning to the mythology of the *Prose Edda*, it may be observed that poetry and invention play a central role in this text. The *Prose Edda* was, after all, conceived and used as a manual in the art of poetry. The Asians not only brought civilization to the North but also introduced the art of poetry. Óðinn, who is depicted as the central character in the mythology of the *Prose Edda*, is also the god of poetry *par excellence*. The mythology of the *Prose Edda*, then, unites the two essential elements that lead to euhemerism – benefactions and poetry – in the characters of the migrating Asians. The poets alter, distort, and falsify, but this is to be expected (it is after all their task, *officium*, see n. 77). The Asians do the same, as the so-called *Edda* epilogue reveals when it states that 'the Asians who are called Æsir falsified those stories about the event that happened at Troy so that people should believe them to be gods'.⁷⁹

If the mythology consists of distortions and falsifications, one may ask why its preservation was considered important. There are few indications that it was seen as a precious repository of knowledge from which one could unearth deep truths about the nature of things or the cosmos in general. It is equally unlikely that one would use it to find historical information about Troy or the war that destroyed it. The Bible, the writings of the church fathers, and the more historical literature about Troy would, after all, be much better sources for this kind of information. Rather, the mythology was considered worthy of preservation partly for its own sake, as it was a vital part of the cultural tradition and inheritance of the North,

but perhaps more importantly because it was inextricably bound up with the traditional art of poetry, whose relevance the *Prose Edda* anxiously tried to preserve.⁸⁰

The Edda Prologue in *Codex Wormianus*

If the prologue to the *Prose Edda* in the standard version presents the rise of disbelief in the North with some sympathy and sees it as a consequence of the cultural benefactions brought about by benevolent culture heroes, the longer version of *Prologus* found in *Codex Wormianus* actively seeks to undermine this view. It does so by highlighting the worship of these false gods and aligning Óðinn with Jupiter and Zoroaster. The Icelandic manuscript *Codex Wormianus* (W, AM 242 fol., c. 1350) is devoted to Old Norse *grammatica*.⁸¹ It contains the four Old Norse grammatical treatises, a prologue to these treatises, the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*, and, crucially in this context, a version of the *Prose Edda* whose text of *Prologus* is almost twice as long as that of the standard version.⁸² The extraordinary length of the W prologue is accounted for by the inclusion of two longer passages and one shorter which are unparalleled in other manuscripts.⁸³ These additional sections are not included in the most commonly read editions⁸⁴ and most discussions of the prologue have ignored them. If they are mentioned, they are typically referred to as interpolations and considered trivial or unimportant.⁸⁵ Accordingly, the *Edda* prologue in W has rarely been analyzed or discussed in the rich scholarly literature on *Prologus*, its intellectual context, and its relation to the remaining parts of the *Prose Edda*.⁸⁶ The judgment of Sigurður Nordal that the additions in W ‘offer nothing of interest’ has largely been accepted.⁸⁷ Exceptions are Males, who discusses the authorship of the additions and their author’s views on a ‘universal phonology’, and Johansson and Strerath-Bolz, who both briefly (and contrary to the argument presented here) argue that the interpolations reinforce the positive attitude already contained in the shorter form of *Prologus*.⁸⁸

In the present undertaking, the sections found only in W will be referred to as additions. This term implies that these sections are secondary to the standard version in terms of date and origin but not importance. Someone, perhaps the fourteenth-century scribe of W, must have found it a matter of great importance to include these passages that do their best to undermine the general attitude to pre-Christian religion of *Prologus*. Furthermore, since the W text of the *Prose Edda* is not otherwise characterized by great deviations from its closest relatives (MSS R and T) – except

that some chapters of *Skáldskaparmál* have been left out, seemingly on purpose – W's additions become all the more important.⁸⁹

The tale of the shorter prologue has already been discussed above. It is a story about a noble people. They originally possessed as good an understanding of the divine as it is possible to obtain while being restricted to earthly understanding, but this understanding had subsequently been obfuscated by linguistic change. The prologue tells the tale of their migration to the North, where they assumed rule over the Northerners, who could see that the Æsir/Asians were their superiors culturally speaking and that subjugation to their regime would be for their own good. The Asians intermarried with the local population, who eventually adopted the language of the Asians. The description of the Asians in Troy and their migration is kept in positive terms. In the long version of the prologue, W, the situation is changed, and the sympathetic view is much less prominent. This ideological change was not effected by changing the existing text, but by the inclusion of three new passages. The three passages peculiar to W give this version of *Prologus* a very different atmosphere than its source. This naturally has significant ramifications for its interpretation. When reading the long version of the prologue as a fully valid and coherent text in its own right, one finds that it deals with presumption, conquests, and arrogance, and that these factors cause the rise of idolatry and linguistic losses. Furthermore, the migration of the Asians and their settling in the North appears much less like a triumphal procession, as they are said to have been forced to flee by the Romans, who, under the leadership of Pompey, advance into their area.⁹⁰

This dramatic reshaping is achieved by narrating three episodes from the history of humankind that are all variants on the same theme. The main characters in these three stories are Zoroaster,⁹¹ Saturn, and Óðinn. These three episodes all present similar stories, and the text's intention appears to be to align the last tale, that of the migrations of Óðinn and the Æsir, with the earlier episodes about Zoroaster and Saturn. Disbelief arose in different places at different times but in similar ways. There is no real difference between the achievements of Óðinn and the Æsir on the one hand and Zoroaster and Saturn on the other, characters who are presented in a negative light in the text. Yet, despite this more critical attitude, the text takes care not to apply the utterly devaluating demonological interpretive framework.

The first section unique to W follows immediately upon the exposition of the account of how humankind arrived at a sort of understanding of the earth and the universe without divine revelation but through analogical

reasoning. As discussed above, the standard version explains how humankind, because of the natural processes of linguistic change, failed in its efforts to preserve its insights by embedding them in the names of things: 'And so that one could more easily talk about them and fix them in memory, they then gave them names among themselves and this religion [these insights?] has changed in many ways as people split up and languages branched.'⁹² The imperfect knowledge gained by observing nature was enshrined in the names that the heathens gave to the elements of nature, and as the names changed, the beliefs changed accordingly. Thus, although there might have been some elements of truth in the heathen understanding of the universe, these elements were distorted as the languages changed. The shorter version of the prologue does not discuss this further and turns to Troy. W, on the other hand, uses this statement as the springboard to unfold the story of the Tower of Babel and, equally important in the context of W, the rise of idolatry.

Genesis 11:1–9 tells the myth of the fall of the one human language and the rise of the many different tongues. It is brief and enigmatic and like many long-lived myths, it raises more questions than it answers. It therefore has the ability to be interpreted meaningfully in various contradictory ways at once and it has been the point of departure for many medieval and post-medieval reflections on the status of the human language(s) and its/their referentiality and conventional nature.⁹³ As it is told in W, the story of the Tower of Babel diverges in various ways from the canonical ones found in Genesis and the patristic tradition. While Genesis presents the initiative to build a tower as a collective decision taken by a unified and concordant humankind⁹⁴ and the mainstream patristic tradition gives the initiative to Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson through Ham and Cush, the Hamite Zoroaster erects the tower in W.⁹⁵ This substitution of Nimrod with Zoroaster may initially seem surprising, but these characters were commonly equated with one another.⁹⁶ Throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Zoroaster was identified with various descendants of Ham, or even with Ham himself.⁹⁷ That it was Zoroaster who built the Tower of Babel is, on the other hand, very rarely spelled out; thus, when Borst, in his monumental *Der Turmbau von Babel*, makes brief reference to the fact that W presents Zoroaster as the initiator of the building of the tower, he sees it as an example of the 'Nachlässigkeit' of the author of the prologue.⁹⁸

The prologue in W explains that when Noah in his old age divided the world among his three sons, Ham received Africa.⁹⁹ Having thus located the Hamite Nimrod/Zoroaster in Africa, the author has to explain why

he relocated to the area of Babylon (i.e., to Asia) where the tower was, according to biblical authority, on the Shinar Plain.¹⁰⁰ The motive is said to have been greed and ambition fed by recent cultural advances and inventions.¹⁰¹ The text does not specify what kinds of discoveries and inventions humankind made in those early days, but in *Stjórn's* description of the same part of world history, the discovery of astronomy is mentioned. It is also said that the tower-building giant Nimrod sought out the inventor of astronomy and learned that art.¹⁰² The Hamites conquer Asia, the land Noah had allotted to Sem and his descendants, in its entirety, but the world is not enough for their insatiable pride. Zoroaster therefore initiates the building of the Tower of Babel, wishing to subject the heavens to his rule as well. God obstructs the construction of the tower by confusing the tongues of its builders and lack of mutual comprehension leads to internal strife, which prevents the builders from completing their plan. Therefore the seventy-two giants, *risar*,¹⁰³ who were the master builders of Babel each set off in their own direction. This unforeseen event does not put an end to the ambitious pride of Zoroaster. He remains in the area and builds the city of Babylon, which he rules as king. In his city, he lets himself be venerated as god under the name Baal or Bel. He had many other names as well, 'and', the text underlines, 'as the names increased, the truth was lost'.¹⁰⁴ The prologue attributes the rise of idolatry to Zoroaster, along with sacrifice to animals, the air, the heavenly bodies, and transitory things. This false belief spread all over the earth until only one people remained that retained knowledge of the true God, namely the Hebrews. In other words, the non-revelatory understanding that humankind had achieved by contemplating the workings of nature with their earthly understanding was all but lost after the division of tongues and the rise of idolatry.¹⁰⁵

Bel, one of the names under which Zoroaster let himself be venerated, is, according to patristic tradition, another name for Saturn.¹⁰⁶ This equation lived on in the Middle Ages through its inclusion in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.¹⁰⁷ Through Bel, Zoroaster can thus also be identified with Saturn, the main character in the second episode that has been added to the W version of *Prologus*.

The story told about Saturn echoes in some respects the one told about Zoroaster. Saturn is said to have been the king of Crete. Although not born into royalty, his extraordinary skills and strength elevated him to this position. Saturn's line of descent is not given in the prologue, but other Old Norse writings trace his genealogy back to Japheth, the son of Noah to whom Europe was allotted.¹⁰⁸ Just like the migrating Æsir who eventually made it to Scandinavia, Saturn causes the crops of the Cretans to

grow abundantly; just like Óðinn, he has prophetic powers;¹⁰⁹ just like the Hamites earlier on (see n. 101), he is the inventor of many new arts, including the art of smelting gold from ore.¹¹⁰ On account of these qualities, the Cretans and, for some reason, the Macedonians begin to worship him as a god, and he claims to be the 'governor' of all things in heaven and on earth.¹¹¹ And thus, the W prologue continues, making explicit the link between Zoroaster and Saturn, 'a second error arose among the Cretans and Macedonians, like the first which arose among the Assyrians and the Chaldeans from Zoroaster'.¹¹²

While it is not explicitly stated that Saturn conquers heaven and earth, it is implied by the fact that he divides his kingdom among his three sons in such a way that Jupiter receives heaven, Neptune earth (rather than the sea, as one would expect), and Plutus (rather than Pluto) hell. Jupiter, however, is not satisfied with the realm he was allotted, so he conquers earth and dethrones and castrates his father Saturn, who has to flee to Italy. In Italy, Saturn resumes his role as culture hero and teaches the local populace how to cultivate the land. Finally, he changes his name to Njǫrðr in order to prevent Jupiter from finding him. The significance of this unexpected choice of alias only becomes apparent when one reaches the last, and shortest, addition to the standard prologue in W, which states that Óðinn similarly changed his name to Njǫrðr once settled in Sigtúnir.¹¹³ Thus, the three characters of Zoroaster, Saturn, and Óðinn not only share similar stories, they are connected through their names and aliases as well.

The longer prologue contains a number of recurrent elements. Among the more important, the following paragraphs will first highlight a nexus of conquests, migrations, and linguistic loss, and thereafter the topic of the rise of disbelief. For some characters in *Prologus*, dissatisfaction with the land they have been allotted leads to migration. Along the way, they conquer new lands and overthrow previous rulers. Zoroaster and the Hamites are discontented with their land (Africa), and so they conquer the land of the Semites (Asia) and move there. They attempt in vain to conquer heaven by building the Tower of Babel. King Saturn of Crete, whose European origin would make him a Japhetide if these categories were applicable to him, must also have made great conquests.¹¹⁴ These enabled him to divide his kingdom in such a way that Jupiter received heaven, Neptunus earth, and Plutus hell. Saturn must, in other words, have succeeded where Zoroaster failed, even without building a tower comparable to that of Babel. But it does not help him in the end, since his own son Jupiter overthrows him and conquers (a part of) earth. Saturn then has to flee to Italy. Tror, 'whom

we call Þórr',¹¹⁵ similarly conquers the land of his foster-father and increases the size of his realm. Finally Óðinn, a descendant of Tror, has to flee to the North along with his Asian host. On the way he conquers a large part of northern Europe and installs his sons as rulers of the different lands. He rules Sigtúnir in Sweden himself.

In the cases of Zoroaster and Óðinn, their actions result in linguistic losses. Earlier in this chapter it was discussed how antediluvian mankind forgot the name of God and was consequently incapable of telling its descendants about God. Thus the knowledge of God was lost. In the postdiluvian period, before humankind spread across the earth, a different kind of knowledge, gained through observation and contemplation, but without divine revelation, replaced the lost knowledge of God. Despite its imperfect nature, both the acquisition of this knowledge and the knowledge itself are described in sympathetic terms in the prologue. Particular importance is attached to the process of naming things in order to remember them.¹¹⁶ As this new knowledge was gained, humans embedded it in the names they gave the elements: 'And in order that one could more easily talk about them and fix them in memory, they then gave names among themselves to all things.'¹¹⁷ The accuracy of these names is secondary to that of the primordial names that Adam gave to the animals when God led them all before him to see what he would call them, and Adam called all the animals by 'their names'.¹¹⁸ One consequence of the conquest of Asia by Zoroaster and the Hamites was that most of humankind lost the language in which true knowledge was embedded. After Babel, a great number of different languages came into being, but now these are all, with the exception of Hebrew, at some remove from the original language. The same persons and things are therefore referred to under many different names. Examples of these different names are given at various points in the text. Thus three of Zoroaster's allonyms are listed: Zoroaster, Bel, and Baal. Of Óðinn's names, Óðinn, Uodenn, and Óðenn¹¹⁹ are mentioned, in addition to Priamus, but the narrator of the prologue is uncertain as to whether Óðinn merely claimed this or whether it is a result of the confusion of tongues at Babel.¹²⁰ Other examples of such allonyms are Munon/Mennon, Tror/Þórr, Tracia/Þrúðheim, Lora/Glora, Athra/Annan, and Frigiða/Frigg.¹²¹ In a similar way, though on a smaller scale, Óðinn's conquest of the North led to the loss of the original northern, but not pre-confusion, tongue. Just as was the case with the primordial language, vestiges of the language spoken in the North before the migration can be found. Once again, however, it is on a smaller scale, namely in some place names.¹²²

The second major theme of the expanded prologue concerns the rise of belief in false gods. This theme lies at the very heart of the W version of the prologue and sets it most clearly apart from the shorter version. Strerath-Bolz underlines that nowhere does the shorter version of the prologue speak of worshipping the immigrated Asians as gods. They are honored as godlike, because of their beauty and extensive knowledge, but only as godlike beings and not as gods.¹²³ The shorter version of the prologue is thus free of the condemning tendency that permeates so many medieval writings on heathen gods. The expanded prologue, on the other hand, is explicit concerning the connection between the Asians and the rise of belief in false gods in the North, and it is thus more in tune with *Gylfaginning*. Indeed, the stories about Zoroaster and Saturn are mainly concerned with the rise of beliefs in false gods, since both characters let themselves be worshipped as gods: Saturn in Crete by the Cretans and the Macedonians, and Zoroaster in Babylon. By aligning these stories with the story of the emigration of Óðinn and the Asians to the North, a less sympathetic view toward heathendom emerges than the view that scholars have seen in the shorter version of the prologue.

How, then, was the belief in false gods held to have arisen? As discussed above, a favorite explanation among patristic and medieval authors was that extraordinary humans came to be venerated as gods. Christian apologists such as Lactantius used this euhemeristic explanation. In the first book of his *Divine Institutes*, entitled *De falsa religione* 'On false religion', he explains at great length how the Greek and Roman gods were mere humans, not gods. Saturn is among his main examples.¹²⁴ Versions of the myth about the Roman god Saturn (equated and conflated with the Greek Kronos) were told in many contexts and were well known in the Middle Ages.¹²⁵ The conflict between father and son, Saturn's subsequent flight to Italy and his civilizing role as first king and bringer of law and agriculture to Italy are also widespread elements although they appear with some variation.¹²⁶ A well-known element of Saturn/Kronos' story that is not included in W is his attempt to prolong his own reign by devouring his children. As told by Hesiod, to whose *Theogony* we owe the oldest version, the son (Zeus) escapes this fate when his mother Rhea hides him in a cave on Crete. In W, where the story has been transposed from the mythic to the historical sphere, Crete is the center of Saturn's kingdom, from which he conquers the world and the heavens.¹²⁷ In Crete, he let himself be venerated as a god, and, even though it is not explicitly said that he continues this practice and demands veneration in Italy as well, Saturn's role as culture hero and the pervasive euhemerism of the prologue make this very

likely. However, Saturn is, much like Óðinn, a complex figure. For some writers, his civilizing efforts in Italy introduce a golden age of peace and prosperity. To others, more intent on discrediting heathen gods, Saturn was a mere human being, albeit with extraordinary skills, or at worst a bloodthirsty demon regularly demanding human sacrifice.¹²⁸ He was also, as in the long version of the W prologue, the equal of Zoroaster/Nimrod/Baal, the inventor of magic and idolatry.

The account of the rise of idolatry in Babylon in W explicitly links it with Zoroaster.¹²⁹ This etiology contrasts with the standard accounts of the origin, such as the one given in the Wisdom of Solomon (14:12–21) (quoted in [Chapter 2](#)). Wisdom mentions an unnamed father, who, grieved by the loss of his son, erected a statue in his honor. *Stjórn*, which refers explicitly to the Wisdom of Solomon in its account of the same events (also quoted in [Chapter 2](#)), replaces the unnamed father who mourned his unnamed son with King Ninus of Nineve, who honors his dead father Belus.¹³⁰ So whereas Wisdom and *Stjórn* focus on absence, grief, and remembrance of the dead, the W prologue centers on pride and self-aggrandization.

Stjórn's source for the etiology of idolatry is Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* (1.101).¹³¹ Vincent himself cites *Historia scholastica* by Petrus Comestor (d. 1178), the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, and Isidore of Seville as his sources. As these works, with the exception of the *Recognitiones*, were among the most important reference works in the Middle Ages and were often used as sources in Old Norse writings, the author of this part of *Stjórn* must be considered to follow the mainstream of the tradition. Parts of this tradition can also be found in *Elucidarius*, supposedly written by Honorius Augustodunensis around 1100.¹³² *Elucidarius*' section on the rise of idolatry was even extrapolated and inserted into the important manuscript *Hauksbók* as a separate section under the rubric: 'Here is told how the sacrifice to idols began'. After having briefly related the story of Ninus and Belus, *Elucidarius* continues: 'But others imitated this and made statues of the beloved friends or of the most powerful kings when they were dead and commanded people to sacrifice to them, like the Romans [sacrificed to] Romulus and the Cretans to Pórr or Óðinn.'¹³³ *Elucidarius* in this way provides another example of how the rise of idolatry is associated with Babylon and Crete, and with Norse as well as Roman gods. Although the names may change, the same story plays out repeatedly on Crete, in Babylon, and in the North.

In the introduction to their edition of *Hauksbók*, Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson wrote with specific reference to the long prologue of the

Prose Edda in W: 'the interpolators of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries rarely exhibit critical acumen'.¹³⁴ By taking a closer look at the longer prologue, however, it becomes apparent that this assessment is not entirely justified. Not only did the author of the long version of the prologue possess a significant amount of learning, he was also capable of transforming and applying this learning in his writings. His account of the rise of idolatry, his physical theology as it were, deviates somewhat from the standard accounts, but not by accident or ineptitude. His deviations have been designed for the specific purpose of lining up the stories of the three characters of Zoroaster, Saturn, and Óðinn in order to show that they are essentially three versions of one and the same story. The shorter version of *Prologus* is permeated by a relatively sympathetic euhemeristic attitude toward the northern mythology without the slightest trace of demonology or idolatry. The longer version of the prologue also steers clear of demonology, but it does much to undermine the favorable account of the short version by introducing the Tower of Babel, Zoroaster, and Saturn as parallels to Troy, Sigtúnir, and Óðinn.

Epilogue: Óðinn and Odysseus

The foregoing chapters have charted medieval Scandinavian thought about the pre-Christian gods as it is available to us through the medium of the written word. A selection of texts all presenting historicizing physical theologies has been discussed and analyzed. Common to the texts is an effort to tie the Norse gods to figures and places that feature in classical mythology and to fit them into a cosmology that is compatible with that of medieval Christianity. Most texts – *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is an exception – also avoid explicit demonization and total devaluation of the former objects of worship.

Sagas dealing with the tenth and early eleventh centuries chronicle the complex and often violent period of conversion as it was remembered and imagined from the vantage point of the thirteenth century. King Hákon the Good in particular, the first Christian king of Norway, is represented as caught between opposing sets of expectations and mutually exclusive obligations. As a Christian he initially endeavored to turn his subjects from disbelief and thus sever the bond between his subjects and their gods. He soon found that his grasp on power depended on his willingness to compromise in religious matters and saw himself forced to participate in pagan blood sacrifices.¹ Other kings of the conversion era are similarly depicted as torn between their own faith and their subjects' expectation that their ruler participate in and perhaps even conduct pagan rituals. The king held a special, exalted position in the land and also had a special responsibility to secure peace and prosperity (*ár ok friðr*) as a mediator between gods and humans.² According to saga tradition, this cultic obligation dates back to the founders of the Yngling dynasty, who, as they settled in Sweden, first established this intermediate role of the king.³ Ever since, leadership in public cult was expected of the kings. As long as no alternative mechanism for obtaining these same goals was provided the old bonds could not be broken.

In Norway, it was not until the martyrdom of Óláfr Haraldsson that an adequate alternative was found. With the royal saint, it became clear not only what the farmers should turn from but also what they should turn to. A new intermediary between the tillers of the soil and the divine power who ruled the seasons was found in this figure.⁴ Already in Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða*, composed a few years after the death of Óláfr Haraldsson in 1030, the responsibility for providing peace and prosperity has been transferred largely intact from pagan cult to the new Christian religious sphere. The intermediary between the human and divine spheres is now the martyred king who can obtain peace and prosperity from God.

The transition from the traditional religious system to Christianity proved difficult for the old gods. In the early phase of Christianization they were effectively sidelined and demonized while the new kind of religiosity established itself. But they were not forgotten. Once the time was ripe and the danger of relapse into paganism had receded from view, scholars and skalds sought ways to secure the future of the old gods by tying them into the now dominant Christian worldview. The texts discussed in the preceding chapters present various solutions to this problem. Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga* and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* explain how disbelief arose in the first place. These texts have been translated into Old Norse but their perspective is universal and hence applicable to the Scandinavian as well as their original contexts. Both texts equate Norse gods with deities venerated in the classical world – Nachor's speech sporadically and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* consistently – and it is clear that Scandinavian paganism is essentially identical to disbeliefs elsewhere and has sprung from the same root. Nachor's speech presents a decadentist model in which true faith gives way to increasingly degenerate forms of disbelief. *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* subscribes to a similar model but adds a demonological element that is otherwise conspicuously absent in the texts discussed in this volume. The texts discussed in [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#), Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta danorum* and the framing material of the *Prose Edda*, are original Scandinavian compositions and have also been tailored more specifically to this context. They both explain how the particular Northern form of disbelief arose. The *Edda* material initially follows Nachor's speech and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* by giving the big universal picture before it brings disbelief to Scandinavia in the shape of the worship of the migrating Asians. Saxo's aim is different and although he focuses on the Scandinavian nations (the Danes in particular) and explicitly rejects the universalizing interpretive model, he nevertheless uses it in his poetry. Saxo and the *Edda* material both tie Norse and classical mythology by stories of the wanderings of

autoeuhemerizing figures. In *Gesta danorum*, these figures, Óðinn in particular, travel back and forth between Byzantium and Scandinavia, while the *Edda* has the future gods migrate from Troy to the North. These two texts also share an emphasis on the delusion or fooling of the ancient Scandinavians by humans (rather than demons), so like Nachor's speech, the origin they posit for disbelief is essentially human. The texts discussed thus all share a desire to tie Norse mythology to texts of a classical origin. Given that the cultural value of classical myth was well established and already securely linked to a Christian worldview this tie served to increase the perceived value of Norse myth as well and to ensure its preservation.

As a medievalist, it has seemed natural and appropriate to me to focus on medieval materials, but the boundary between the Middle Ages and the post-medieval period, normally defined in Scandinavia by the Protestant Reformation in the mid sixteenth century, is artificial and somewhat arbitrary. This is particularly true in the case of mythology, where medieval patterns of thinking and explanatory models subsisted tenaciously long after the Reformation.⁵ To medieval writers, as we have seen, it had been a matter of great concern to situate Norse myth within Christian and classical parameters. This concern neither changed radically nor disappeared with the Reformation, but now printing technology ensured that the classics were much more widely disseminated than in the Middle Ages. So as the Northern classics began to come to light, scholars naturally continued to further refine their understanding of Norse myth in the light of the classical tradition.

By means of two examples, this epilogue will show how the migration myth and the identificatory and universalist interpretive mode that underlies *interpretatio* continued to appeal strongly to men of learning in the period between the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and how they continued to eschew the demonological framework. Scandinavian savants were now more thoroughly familiar with the classics of Greek and Roman antiquity than ever before and able to access them in their original languages. The Northern classics, on the other hand, were still being discovered and published for the first time. Non-Icelandic scholars rarely possessed the linguistic skills required to tackle these texts in an adequate manner, and Icelandic translators were therefore indispensable.

As examples of scholarship of this period, I have chosen works associated with the learned Icelander Guðmundur Andrússon (c. 1615–54) and the Norwegian parson Jonas Ramus (1649–1718). Guðmundur and Ramus are by no means unknown or forgotten today, but their works and ideas on mythology have not been much studied. One reason for this is perhaps

that their studies fall between two camps. The works of medieval scholars are considered a part of the tradition rather than of scholarship and therefore not judged by our scholarly standards. Post-medieval authors, on the other hand, such as Guðmundur and Ramus, presented their work as scholarship, but being pre-scientific, they naturally fall short of our expectations for scholarship, and if their works are discussed at all, they are typically presented as curiosities rather than as attempts, along the lines of the medieval texts, to understand Norse myth and its relation to the Christian and classical traditions.

Guðmundur's biography is colorful and relatively well known.⁶ While imprisoned in the famed Blåtårn prison at Christiansborg castle in Copenhagen for writing a polemical treatise entitled *Discursus oppositivus*, his talents came to the attention of the renowned Danish physician, antiquarian, and polymath Ole Worm (d. 1654).⁷ Worm interceded with the Danish authorities and had Guðmundur pardoned in 1649. Guðmundur matriculated at the University of Copenhagen, and when he died of cholera five years later, he left behind a pioneering body of unpublished scholarly works. Notes by Guðmundur on the Eddic poems *Völuspá* and *Hávamál* were published by P. H. Resen in 1665 as appendices to his printed edition of the two poems, the first ever to be published.⁸ In 1673, almost twenty years after Guðmundur's death, an edition of *Völuspá* with a text, translation, and full commentary, all by Guðmundur, was published and ten years later still, in 1683, his Icelandic dictionary *Lexicon islandicum* was printed as well.⁹ These works give a fascinating picture of the state of scholarship and mythological thinking in the seventeenth century. The dictionary contains entries on a great number of Icelandic words, as well as some entries on names of gods in which the gods are typically identified with figures or deities known from classical or biblical tradition. The name of Baldr is explained as derived from Baal or Belus and etymologized as Belides in the sense 'a descendant of Belus'; the Vanir are identified as Venetians and their kingdom Vanaheimr as Wallachia; Rígr, whom the prose introduction to the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* identifies with Heimdallr, is identified with Dionysus, and so on.¹⁰ In a more elaborate entry, Loki and his father Farbauti are identified as Lapithas and Phorbas, two Thessalian characters in Greek myth.¹¹

The dictionary format did not allow Guðmundur Andrússon to present an overarching model that explained how these correspondences came about, but his preface to the commented edition of *Völuspá* shows that he, as was common at the time, takes the migration myth of the *Prose Edda* literally. The seeress of *Völuspá*, he explains, was the famous Erythraean

Sybil. As the Asians migrated to Scandinavia, they brought the poem *Völuspá* with them.¹² The link with traditions of the Mediterranean world is therefore a historical one. With this theoretical framework in mind, it becomes easier to appreciate the abundance of names from classical mythology in Guðmundur's dictionary as well in his translation and commentary to *Völuspá*.

In order to give a sense of the flavor of Guðmundur's *Völuspá*, the opening stanza of the Icelandic text is presented along with his Latin translation:

Hliodz bid ek allar Helgar Kindur
Meire ok minne mögu Heim dallar
Villde ek Valföðurs vel umtelia
Fornspiöll fira þau ek fremst of nam.¹³

Silence I ask of all holy descendants, the
greater and lesser progeny of Heimdallr.
I wanted to recount the trickery of Valföðr
well; the old accounts of men, the foremost
that I know.

Sileat qvæso Divum omne genus,
Major ceu minor sati Dionysio,
En velim Jovis artes eloqui
Vetusta hominum velut agnoram, elogia.

I ask the entire divine race to be silent, the
greater as well as the lesser, sprung from
Dionysus, see, I would pronounce the wiles
of Jupiter, the oldest accounts of men, just
as I had learned them.

Each stanza is followed by a commentary in which Guðmundur gives expanded glosses to words found in the stanza. As in the dictionary, a good many words are explained through more or less fanciful Greek, Latin, or Hebrew etymologies that often give witness to great learning and inventiveness. In his commentary to the first stanza, Guðmundur explains (among other things) that *helgar* is a form of the adjective *heilagur* 'holy'. He then goes on to derive *heilagur* from the word *heið*, which he defines as 'precious property' (cf. the entry on *heið* f. in his dictionary), and explains the word *heiðingar* (i.e. heathens) as 'mammonists' because, as he states, the pagans held gold and riches as gods.¹⁴

Guðmundur's learned works are written in Latin, but a vernacular mythological text of this same period, known as *Annar formáli nýgjörður*, is occasionally associated with his name as well. This text is found in numerous younger manuscripts containing Eddic materials.¹⁵ It has not been much studied and has yet to appear in print. It has here been read in the version found in NkS 1867 4to, an eighteenth-century manuscript, well known for its charming illustrations of various scenes from Norse mythology, penned by Ólafur Brynjólfsson.¹⁶ Although it is possible that Guðmundur Andrússon authored *Annar formáli nýgjörður*, this text is quite different from the texts that are securely attributed to Guðmundur.

Where the scholarly works in Latin focus on Scandinavian myth and draw on classical materials for their explanatory power, *Annar formáli nýgjörður* mainly concentrates on classical myth and has some references to Norse materials. Guðmundur Andrússon's Latin works furthermore focus on the literal (historical) meaning of the texts rather than on matters of physical, ethical, or 'theognostic' interpretation, as he himself explains at the conclusion of his full commentary on *Völuspá*.¹⁷ *Annar formáli nýgjörður* gives etymologies akin to those of Guðmundur's Latin texts,¹⁸ but it also takes some steps in the direction of a non-literal and allegorical or moral interpretation of characters in the mythology. Toward the end of the text, in a section entitled *Notatio de idolomania*, the name of Bel/Baal is first explained as friend and friendship and then linked to Baldr. On this basis, an allegorical interpretation of the myth of Baldr's death is presented in which his brother, the blind Höðr, is allegorized as 'blind greed' and Loki as 'lie and defamation':

The first thing is that Baldur is the best, the most merciful, fair spoken, and that little was unappealing about Baldur; for Friendship or Love hide blemishes. He was also handsome to look at, just as concord is pure. The second thing is that Höðr the Blind, on Loki's advice, harmed him with the mistletoe. That is, blind Avarice destroyed Friendship with weapons, which at first were short twigs. That is, the iron was in the ground and not yet used to forge swords before Loki, that is Lies and Defamation, tore it from the ground and began to forge weapons and armor in order to destroy the concord between men and good agreements. Baldur would certainly have been brought back from Hel if all were willing to mourn him and strove to recover Friendship. But it does not turn out like that for the giantess Þökk, 'ingratitude', is the least willing to do so. For those who have the most reason to be thankful to someone often betrays this person's life and honor most of all.¹⁹

Although allegorizing interpretations such as this one have been commonplace in the treatment of classical mythology since antiquity, interpretations of Norse myth have, as it has been shown in this volume, up to this point tended toward historicization rather than allegorization. *Annar formáli nýgjörður* therefore departs markedly from Scandinavian tradition in this respect.

The historicizing trend continues into the eighteenth century, when the Norwegian parish priest Jonas Ramus takes it to new heights. Ramus was, as Guðmundur Andrússon had been, well versed in the classics of Greek and Roman antiquity, and he drew on this knowledge to make sense of the Old Norse texts at his disposal. But whereas Guðmundur was centrally placed in Copenhagen and had an intimate knowledge of Old Icelandic

literature and the language in which it was written, Ramus's position was that of an outsider and it is evident that he had to rely to a large extent on translations of Norse texts. Like many of his predecessors, Ramus took his point of departure in the Troy legend, but his interpretation differed markedly from those who had gone before him when he identified Óðinn with the widely traveled Odysseus and localized the places visited by Odysseus on his way home from Troy along the European coastline between Asia Minor and the island of Hinnøya in northern Norway.

After the long siege of Troy had ended with the victory of the Greeks, they set out for home. Many had a difficult journey, but Odysseus' was particularly long and troublesome and lasted no fewer than ten years.²⁰ In antiquity, claims had often been made that Odysseus had founded this or that city in the course of his prolonged wanderings, and thus the 'city-destroying'²¹ Odysseus also became a creator of cities and progenitor of noble houses. Rulers of the Etruscans, for instance, were in Hesiod's *Theogony* said to have descended from Odysseus,²² and alternate versions of the story of Rome's origins also feature Odysseus in important roles.²³ It was also claimed that Odysseus played a central part in foundations further afield. The ancient geographer Strabo, e.g., had asserted that Odysseus founded Lisbon.²⁴ Not long afterward, Tacitus reported that Odysseus was the founding father of a city on the Rhine by the name of Asciburgium,²⁵ and that monuments and tombs inscribed with Greek letters have been found in that area. Tacitus, however, does not vouch for the veracity of this information – 'I intend neither to confirm nor refute these claims: let each man believe or disbelieve them according to his own disposition', he writes.²⁶ Others, including Jonas Ramus, were more favorably disposed toward an Odyssean origin for Asciburgium. Ramus also proposed the etymology 'Asi-purgion' for Asciburgium; that is: the city of the Asians, i.e., Trojans. Why the Greek Odysseus, who played a leading role in the destruction of Troy, would go on to name a city after his antagonists the Trojans will become clear in the following paragraphs.

Jonas Ramus's elaborate argument for the identity of Odysseus and Odin is an excellent example of how the Norse gods and the stories told about them survived long after the end of the Middle Ages and formed new divergent or alternative versions of the well-known mythological story world. As scholars sought to penetrate the surface of these myths in order to arrive at some sort of understanding of their origin and meaning, they contributed to the perpetuation of the mythic dynamics, and the mythology lived on, at least on desktops and in drawers. In 1693, at the age of forty-four, Ramus published his first work of history,

entitled *Nori Regnum: Hoc est Norvegia antiqua et ethnica, sive historiae Norvegicae prima initia, a primo Norvegiae Rege, Noro, usque ad Haraldum Harfagerum* (The rule of Nor: That is the Old Pagan Norway, or the first beginnings of Norwegian history, from the first Norwegian king, Nor, until Harald Hair-Fair). In this work, he briefly adumbrated the novel theory that Odin and Odysseus were one and the same.²⁷ In 1702, he published a full 200-page monograph entitled *Ulysses et Otinus unus & idem sive Disquisitio historica & geographica, quâ, ex collatis inter se Odyssea Homeri, & Edda island. homerizante, Othini fraudes deteguntur, ac detractâ larva in lucem protrahitur Ulysses* (Odysseus and Odin [are] one and the same or, a historical and geographical treatise in which through a juxtaposition of Homer's *Odyssey* and the comparable *Edda* of the Icelanders the deceits of Odin are revealed and, the mask having been pulled away, Odysseus is dragged forth into the light), in which he argued his case with great conviction. In the course of his wide travels, Odysseus adopted the name of Odin and visited the shores of Norway, where he became the progenitor of the earls of Hlaðir. The very elaborate arguments proposed by Ramus in support of this theory testify to his wide reading of classical literature as well as the works of more recent historians, geographers, and antiquarians. He also used some Norse texts, particularly the *Prose Edda* ascribed to Snorri Sturluson that had been published by Resen with parallel Latin and Danish translations in 1665,²⁸ to corroborate his claims. But in Ramus's days, many Old Norse texts still awaited publication, and this naturally meant that the range of Old Norse texts available to him was rather limited. He also had the disadvantage of not having easy access to medieval manuscripts, since his parish of Norderhov, near Hønefoss, was situated far from the main centers of learning at that point in time. However, this hinterland position did not prevent his works from being read. In 1711, a Danish translation by Anders Jenssøn Borch, a chaplain at Akershus castle, of *The Reign of Nor* was published, entitled *Det gamle og hedenske Norge* (The Old and Pagan Norway). His treatise on Odin and Odysseus was published three times in 1702, 1713, and 1716; in the later editions he refined and expanded his arguments.²⁹ Ramus wrote both these historical works in the international language of scholarship in his day, but he also left behind a considerable number of writings in Danish on history, biology, and dialectology. His greatest success, however, was a piece of devotional literature called *Naadens Aandelige Markets-tid* (The Spiritual Market Time of Grace).³⁰ Ramus was, in other words, a prolific writer, although he is all but forgotten now.³¹ Some of his contemporaries, such as the manuscript collector Ární Magnússon and the royal

historiographer of Norway, Tormod Torfæus, were critical of his historiographical efforts, and Árni Magnússon feared that Ramus 'or someone like him' would be appointed royal historiographer of Norway should Torfæus pass away 'and write some nonsense which confuses the half-taught and disgraces the occupation of the learned'.³² In 1771, fifty-four years after the final edition of Ramus's treatise, Peter Frederik Suhm summarily dismissed Ramus's efforts in his own monograph on Odin, stating that Ramus had presented 'many shrewd and ingenious but few conclusive proofs' of the oneness of the two.³³ When Ramus's mythological work is mentioned by scholars of our era, it is presented as a curiosity rather than as a serious attempt to arrive at some sort of understanding of Old Norse mythology.³⁴

Although it will probably be difficult to find a modern reader who finds Ramus's arguments persuasive, his work merits more attention than it has hitherto been granted. When mentioned, Ramus's treatise is generally compared with Olof Rudbeck's massive *Atlantica*, which appeared in Sweden between 1679 and 1702. *Atlantica* was the talk of the day in this period, and Ramus certainly knew of its existence. In the first edition of *Ulysses et Outinus*, he claims that he has not yet had the occasion to examine Rudbeck's work.³⁵ However, there is a significant difference in the attitude of the two authors to their material. While Rudbeck claimed to have identified the cradle of humanity and the root of civilization in Sweden, Ramus's work is much less patriotic: he does not assign the Norwegians or Norwegian soil a particularly noble or praiseworthy role in the history of humankind. The guileful Odysseus arrives on Norwegian shores and, under the name of Odin, fools the Norwegians into venerating him as a god. Ramus's claim is that he has seen through the deceit and trickery and that he can reveal the true identity of the imposter. This is clear from Ramus's preface, where he presents his thesis in a rhetorical style that is slightly more elevated than the one used elsewhere in his book:

That Greek one, Odysseus, who is completely made up of trickery and deceits, and who was never one and the same wherever he went but often made up another name or another fatherland for himself and who, like Proteus and Vertumnus, always assumed varying appearances, has long enough deluded not only Polyphemus but the whole Northern world under the name of Outinus. Now at last, however, the mask of the impostor, the one under which he has hidden unrecognized for almost twenty-nine centuries, is to be drawn off. It is said about Otinus [Odin], among other things, that he once assumed the shape of a serpent. But now we will see Odysseus slither forth from that old serpent skin under

which the treacherous and deceitful Otinus [Odin] has resided long enough.³⁶

This passage hints at Ramus's central argument, which he presents in full in the second section of the second chapter of his treatise. Here he discusses Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus.³⁷ In this episode, told in book 9 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus famously hid his true identity and claimed that his name was No-one, Οὔτις (Outis) in Greek: 'No-one is my name; mother and father and all the other followers call me No-one.'³⁸ The name No-one appears twice in this passage, once in the nominative and once in the accusative. The accusative form given in the Greek text is οὔτιν, but Ramus points out that the expected accusative form is οὔτινα rather than οὔτιν. Beginning with this unexpected form, Ramus argues that οὔτις (with the accusative form οὔτιν) cannot be the pronoun meaning 'no one' and that it therefore is incorrect to translate οὔτις as 'No-one'. Instead, οὔτις is a proper name, Οὔτις, and should be left untranslated. Ramus is not the first one to have fastened upon οὔτις in its various forms, and he cites Ptolemy Haphaestion, to whom the ninth-century patriarch Photius attributed in his *Bibliotheca* the opinion that Odysseus had been called Οὔτις by his parents and friends because he had large ears – Greek οὖς means 'ear'.³⁹ On these grounds, Ramus proposes that Outis is a pet name of Odysseus used by his friends and family, and he suggests that, when traveling, Odysseus often sought to hide his true identity by using his pet name 'Outis'. The people of the North, having little knowledge of Greek, used the oblique form and simply called him Outin or Odin:

From what has been said, it is thus clear that Odysseus, when on his journey, wanted to be called Outis [acc. *Outin*] so that he could travel without being recognized: as he uttered this name in Greek in the oblique case, our ancestors, who were ignorant of the Greek language, also called him Outin in the nominative. All our books of history are full of that name, proclaiming that some Outin, Otin or Odin, whom they have translated as Otinus [acc. *Otinum*] in Latin, once came to us in the north from Asia. Yet although it has hitherto been unknown to us who he was, we now, at last, begin to discern the man from the name, and we can assess the lion from its claw.⁴⁰

At its core, Ramus's argument thus rests on a linguistic misunderstanding, yet, where the *Odyssey* attributes the misunderstanding to the Cyclops, Ramus attributes it the ancient Scandinavians.⁴¹

Ramus is generally careful not to base his arguments on the resemblance of names only, and he cautions explicitly against this procedure on one

occasion.⁴² On another occasion, he jokingly proposes that Circe and her island of Aeaea (Gr. Αἰαία, written Ajaia by Ramus) is a permutation of the Norwegian *Kierrinka aa eya* 'the old woman/hag on the island'.⁴³ However, his proposal that Circe is to be equated with the giantess Hyrrokkin (written Hirokin by Ramus), who alone was able to launch Baldr's funeral ship, is sincere, and he adduces elements from the account of Baldr's funeral in *Gylfaginning* as well as other arguments that, in his view, strengthen this idea.⁴⁴ His skeptical attitude regarding similarities of names or words also leads him to adduce many additional arguments for the identification of Óðinn and Odysseus. In particular, he argues that his theory is supported by chronology and geography. The chronological part of the argument is passed over relatively briefly, but he claims that Óðinn arrived in the North soon after the end of the Trojan War.⁴⁵ The geographical argument, on the other hand, is elaborately presented and takes up a large portion of his work. Ramus seeks to identify the locations Odysseus is said to have visited *en route* from Troy.⁴⁶

Ramus takes the stories told in *The Odyssey* and in the *Prose Edda* more literally than most of today's readers, but he is not an uncritical reader of the texts and is by no means a literalist. He readily acknowledges that his texts might contain errors or untruths, and particular pieces of information are sometimes explained as possible misunderstandings of Homer or as falsifications in the *Prose Edda*.⁴⁷ His main explanatory model, however, is founded on the story of Odysseus as it is told in the *Odyssey*, partly by Odysseus himself, and he sees it as a story that is fundamentally historical in nature.

Ramus believes that Odysseus did undertake a prolonged journey, but he is also of the opinion that much of what is related in the text stems from Odysseus' tall tales. At every turn, Ramus knows that he is dealing with an unreliable narrator, and he sets himself the task of sifting truths from untruths in Odysseus' stories and of uncovering what really happened. One example of this is Odysseus' account of his stay on Circe's island. Ramus does not doubt that Odysseus really spent one year feasting and sleeping with Circe, 'the loveliest of all immortals', but he argues that Odysseus made up the part about the enchantment and about how his men were turned into pigs when he later had to explain to his wife Penelope why he stayed so long on the island.⁴⁸

If one were to accept the identification of Odin with Odysseus, many questions would soon arise – and Ramus, of course, has answers for some of them. One central problem is that the *Prose Edda* indisputably links the Norse gods with the Trojans.⁴⁹ According to medieval etymological

Table E.1 *Ramus's identifications of the stops on Odysseus' route*

Stops on Odysseus' route according to the <i>Odyssey</i>	Identification by Ramus
Troy	Troy
City of the Cicones	Ismarus in Thrace (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 49–50)
Land of the Lotus Eaters	By the southern shore of the Gibraltar strait (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 52–4)
Land of Cyclopes	Cape Finisterre, Galicia (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 54–61)
Island of Aeolus	Somewhere in the British Isles, perhaps by the Severn or the Humber Estuary (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 62–7)
Land of the Laestrygonians	Ramus is uncertain and proposes a number of locations from Uxellodunum, near the river Dordogne in SW France, to Lemvig in NW Jutland (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 75–83)
Island of Circe	An unidentified Danish island (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 91–2)
City of the Cimmerians	In the far north of Europe (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 97–105)
Island of the Sirens	Ramus does not identify this island, although he discusses various Norwegian legends about fairy isles (Hulderland) and other remote islands, including Røst, Værøy, Lovund, and Jomfruland (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 109–16)
Scylla and Charybdis	Moskstraumen, the tidal maelstrom just south of Lofoten. Ramus states that the maelstrom is divided in two and that the northern part between Lofotodden and Ambaaren (I have not been able to locate Ambaaren on a map, but judging by Ramus's description, it is one among the cluster of islets due north of Mosken) is to be identified with Scylla, while the southern part, between Mosken and Verøy, is to be identified with Charybdis (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 116–30)
Thrinacia – Island of the Sun	Although Ramus expresses doubts about the identification of this location, he proposes Træna, outside Mo i Rana (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 137–40)
Ogygia – Island of Calypso	Hinnøya, the island on which Harstad is situated today (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 143–50)
Scheria – Island of the Phaeacians	Ramus finds that Ireland is not an unreasonable identification for this location (Ramus, <i>Tractatus historico-geographicus</i> , pp. 161–3)
Ithaca	Ithaca

reasoning, the very name of the Norse gods, the Æsir, points to Asia (i.e. Asia Minor, where Troy is located), the abode of the Norse gods, Ásgarðr, is explicitly linked with Troy and so on. Ramus ingeniously circumvents this problem by arguing that, during his travels, Odysseus kept his Greek identity secret and claimed to be a Trojan. Ramus explains: 'As much as Odysseus was a Greek, yet, when he came from Asia and discovered how celebrated the memory of the Trojans was in the North and, perhaps, conversely how the Greeks were despised because of the destruction of Troy, he preferred to claim that he was Asian and Trojan, so that he would be met with greater goodwill and favor.'⁵⁰

Odysseus spent seven years with Calypso on the island of Ogygia, and it was therefore essential for Ramus to identify that island. In his treatise he describes how he tried out various theories before he eventually settled on the island of Hinnøya, in northern Norway. Ramus then cites a few verses from Hesiod's *Theogony*, in which Odysseus is said to have sired sons who ruled 'very far off in a retreat of holy islands',⁵¹ and he suggests that these Holy Islands are identical with Helgeland or Hålogaland, names he etymologizes as 'Holy land'.⁵² Finally, he equates this with the region from which the earls of Hlaðir, as descendants of Odin, traced their origin – and thus Odysseus became the progenitor of the Norwegian earls.

Ramus presents a story about the arrival of the Æsir, and Odin in particular, in the North that differs markedly from the one found in the Snorronic writings. There is no need to refute his claims, and it is easy to find fault with his reasoning. However, one can marvel at how inventively he not only operates within the paradigm of his times – and in this period Óðinn was commonly held to have migrated to the North, as described in the Snorronic works – but also strives to make sense of Norse mythology with the help of the much richer source material of classical antiquity. Like others before him, he sought a way to write the Norse past into the greater history of civilization by tying it to a canonical narrative of antiquity. He scrutinized critically the earlier attempt to link the two mythological worlds that is presented in the *Prose Edda* and rejected it in favor of another model in which the cards were shuffled in a different way. The Norse gods did claim that they were Trojans, as described in the *Prose Edda*, and they did fool the inhabitants of the North, but this was not the end of the story. The trickery and deceit is more complex than that, and the man behind it all was the guileful Odysseus.

Notes

1 Retying the Bonds

- 1 Schjødt, 'Christianization of the North', p. 304. For the distinction between local and world religions, see e.g. Petts, *Pagan and Christian*, pp. 30–5, and Jensen, *What is Religion?*, pp. 47–59.
- 2 See e.g. Brink, 'How Uniform was Old Norse Religion' and Gunnell, 'From One High-One to Another'.
- 3 Furthermore, it has been noted that '[m]ost Christians were not interested in the details of non-Christian practice', Palmer, 'The Otherness of Non-Christians', p. 36.
- 4 'Meo autem arbitrato, sicut inutile videtur eorum acta scrutari, qui non crediderunt, ita impium est preterire salutem eorum, qui primum crediderunt, et per quos crediderunt', Adam of Bremen, 1.61, p. 59.
- 5 Adam of Bremen, 4.25, p. 257.
- 6 'Ceterum neniae, quae in eiusmodi ritu libationis fieri solent, multiplices et inhonestae, ideoque melius reticendae', Adam of Bremen, 4.27, p. 260.
- 7 Mundal, 'Female Mourning Songs', pp. 379–81, briefly discusses the stanzas of *Vølsa þáttur* and the equally infamous *Grettisfærsla* in terms of 'lost oral poetry' associated with fertility rituals.
- 8 Old Norse *ótrú*, which literally means 'unbelief', is difficult to render satisfactorily into Modern English. The Old Norse translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* devotes a sentence to this word, explaining that 'unbelievers' do have beliefs, but that they are of the wrong kind: 'Disbelievers do believe, but not in God, because they would not be disbelievers if they believed in God'; 'Hafa ótrúir menn trú, ok þeygi til Guðs, því at þeir væri eigi ótrúir ef þeir trýði Guði', *HMS* vol. 1, p. 235 (Old Norse quotations are given in normalized orthography throughout). According to this text, *ótrú* designated not the absence of belief, but an erroneous belief. *Ótrú* could be rendered 'paganism', but this term seems too broad and 'disbelief' has therefore been used. This term retains the distinct emphasis on 'belief' (as opposed to practice) but replaces the privative prefix *ó-* 'un-', with the latinate 'dis-'. This term is used throughout to designate a belief of the wrong kind rather than incredulity or astonishment.
- 9 In a series of fascinating if controversial studies, Assmann refers to this distinction between one true and many false gods as 'the Mosaic distinction' (e.g. *Moses the Egyptian*, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung*, and *Of God and Gods*).

- 10 Although his cultic significance, which is of course another matter, might not have been equally great in all places and milieus, as Gunnell, ‘Hvé hárr var hinn hávi’, emphasizes.
- 11 The term *aldaǫðr* occurs in Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, st. 14, where it forms part of a kenning for Þórr (*sonr Aldaǫðrs*, *Skj* BI, p. 3). The variant reading *alfǫðr* ‘father of all’ is also attested (*Skj* AI, p. 3). *Gylfaginning*, p. 21 interprets the Óðinn name *Alfǫðr* as ‘father of all gods’, *faðir allra goða*. Differing interpretations of the designations/names *alfǫðr* and *aldaǫðr* are given by Strandberg, ‘On the Etymology’, pp. 102–8.
- 12 Adam of Bremen 4.26, p. 258.
- 13 See Brink, ‘How Uniform was the Old Norse Religion’, pp. 111–13 and 129–31, and Gunnell ‘From One High-One to Another’, p. 162)
- 14 Old Norse sources render this name *Óðinsvé* ‘sanctuary of Óðinn’ and the form ‘Odansue’, used by Adam of Bremen 4.4, p. 232, points to the same origin. On Danish place names connected with Óðinn in general, see Hald, ‘The Cult of Odin’.
- 15 See the studies in Hultgård ed., *Uppsala och Adam av Bremen*.
- 16 The earlier history of the cult or worship of Óðinn in Scandinavia (and elsewhere) is more difficult to assess. Hultgård, ‘Odin: An Immigrant in Scandinavia?’, gives a brief review of the scholarship on the complex question of the possible migration of the cult of Óðinn/Wodan to Scandinavia from the south. Gunnell, ‘From One High-One to Another’, discusses, among other things, the appeal of Óðinn to Scandinavian rulers of the mid first millennium.
- 17 ‘Óðinn er æztr ok elztr Ásanna. Hann ræðr ǫllum hlutum’, *Gylfaginning*, p. 21.
- 18 It is worth noting that when the theophoric names for the days of the week were introduced among speakers of Germanic languages, it was the thunder-god (ON Þórr) who was equated with Jupiter, the head of the Roman pantheon. The names of the days of the week will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.
- 19 On the development and explication of pantheons, see Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, pp. 17–29, and Gunnell, ‘Hvé hárr var hinn hávi?’ and ‘Pantheon?’.
- 20 ‘[O]mnes dii gentium daemonia’, Ps. 95.5 *iuxta* LXX, *Vulgata*, p. 890. See also Lassen, ‘Gud eller djævel?’.
- 21 ‘But that Clemens does such a disgrace and dishonor to Óðinn, our help and refuge, that he calls him a fiend and an unclean spirit’; ‘En þá ósoemþ ok óvirþing veitir hann Óþni órlausnafullum ok hvarfsemi at síá Clemens kallar hann fjánda ok óhreinan anda’, *Clemens saga*, p. 44. Clemens’s accusations against the pagan gods are reported by some supporters of the idolater Publius Torquatianus. The saga of St. Sebastianus also calls Óðinn an ‘unclean spirit’, *HMS* vol. II, p. 233.
- 22 ‘Djöflar kvámu ok stundum at freista hans í ýmsum líkjum, ok allra optast í líki Þórs eða Óðins eða Freyju. En Martinus hafði krossmark at skildi við allri freistni þeira’, *HMS* vol. I, p. 569; also p. 618. A similar attitude can be observed in later sagas of the same genre. In the saga of St. Catharina, the

- queen of Emperor Maxencius alludes to Ps. 95.5, stating that ‘Þórr and Óðinn and all gods and gods of the pagans are devils and of no use ... they can do good for neither themselves nor others’; ‘En Þórr ok Óðinn ok allir guðar ok goð heiðinna manna eru djöflar ok engu nýt ... þau megu hvárki sér gótt gera né ǫðrum’, *HMS* vol. 1, p. 417.
- 23 This approach to translation and mythology is known as *interpretatio norræna* and will be discussed in some detail in [Chapter 3](#).
 - 24 ‘Quidam e sacerdotibus, qui ad Ubsolam demonibus astare solebat’, Adam of Bremen 4.28, p. 260. Note, however, that the following sentence refers to them as gods.
 - 25 ‘Confirmatus igitur Hocon in regno coepit dæmonum esse præcipuus servus’, Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum*, p. 13.
 - 26 Schomerus, *Die Religion der Nordgermanen*, pp. 72–80, provides a wealth of examples. A handful of more subtle examples of the demonization of Óðinn is given by Foote, ‘Observations on “Syncretism”’, pp. 95–8.
 - 27 ‘Óvinr alls mannkyns, sjálfr hjandinn’, *Flateyjarbók* vol. 1, p. 376. The early saga of Óláfr Tryggvason by Oddr munkr, pp. 252–3, which is clearly influenced by hagiographic writings, identifies the stranger in a similar manner, although with fewer words. The same story is found in *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 314, where it is presented in a more secularized version that retains the references to Óðinn but refrains from equating him with the devil. This is consistent with *Heimskringla*’s treatment of materials derived from hagiographic or semi-hagiographic sources. For a survey of the contents of the various versions of the Qgvaldsnes episode, see Kaplan, *Thou Fearful Guest*, pp. 164–7.
 - 28 ‘Höfðingi myrkranna’, *FAS* vol. III, p. 352.
 - 29 ‘Mestr hjanda’, N B241, no edition located. Cited from MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, p. 31; the number comes from Tarrin Wills’s database (skaldic.abdn.ac.uk).
 - 30 Reflexes of this term survive in various Indo-European languages: in Old Norse as the name of Týr, the god who dispenses victory to warriors, so *Gylfaginning*, p. 25, in Latin as *deus* ‘god’, in Sanskrit as *devá-* ‘god’, among others.
 - 31 Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction*, pp. 408–9; see also Herrenschmidt and Kellens, ‘Daiva’.
 - 32 Clunies Ross, ‘Närvaron och frånvaron’, pp. 17–18; see also Clunies Ross, ‘Two Old Icelandic Theories of Ritual’.
 - 33 On the myth-ritual theory and the debate it has generated, see Versnel, ‘What’s Sauce for the Goose’, who focuses on the ancient world, and Segal ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, an anthology of central scholarship devoted to this issue.
 - 34 Of prominent scholarship on Old Norse texts with a myth-ritualist perspective, one may mention Schjødt, *Initiation between Two Worlds* and Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama*.
 - 35 On Varro’s works, see Cardauns’s handy introduction, *Macrus Terrentius Varro*.
 - 36 Augustine, *City of God*, p. 242. ‘Cum vero deos eosdem ita coluerit colendosque censuerit, ut in eo ipso opere litterarum suarum dicat se timere ne

pereant ... civium neglegentia.’ And ‘in memoria bonorum ... recondi’, Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.2.

- 37 According to Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.3, *Divine Antiquities* consisted of a general introduction, three books about the various religious officers and offices, three books about the places where the gods were worshipped, three books about feast days, three about actual rites, and three about the gods themselves. The edition of the fragments of Varro’s *Divine Antiquities* by Cardauns includes 284 (mostly rather short) fragments.
- 38 Clark, ‘Augustine’s Varro’.
- 39 It is usually held that the notion of a tripartite theology was widespread before the time of Varro and that he adapted it from Greek philosophers, see e.g. Lieberg, ‘The *Theologia Tripartita*’. Rüpke, ‘Varro’s *tria genera theologiae*’, pp. 172–85, on the other hand argues that it originated with Varro. A comparable, although not identical, tripartition is ascribed to Q. Mucius Scaevola (consul 95 BCE). According to Augustine, who might be quoting Varro at this point, Scaevola claimed that three kinds of gods had been handed down (*tria genera tradita deorum*, *De civitate Dei* 4.27): one kind by poets, another by philosophers, and a third by statesmen.
- 40 Augustine, *City of God*, p. 246. ‘*Tria genera theologiae ... id est rationis quae de diis explicatur*’, Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.5.
- 41 Augustine introduces and characterizes these three theologies in *De civitate Dei* 6.5. In the sections that follow, he polemicizes against them.
- 42 Fragments of this massive work are preserved in the Norwegian National Archives (NRA lat. frag. 51, 1–7, see Karlsen, ‘Fragments of Patristic’, p. 223).
- 43 Assmann, ‘Monotheism and Polytheism’, p. 17. Assmann’s understanding, discussion, and application of Varro’s tripartite theology, see e.g. Assmann, ‘Monotheism and Polytheism’ and *Of God and Gods*, pp. 9–27, are rather different from what is presented here.
- 44 One of the exciting developments in the study of classical religion in recent years has been the focus on pagan inclusive monotheism, such as in the anthologies *One God* and *Monotheism between Pagans and Christians* edited by Mitchell and van Nuffelen.
- 45 Tertullian, who also drew on Varro’s threefold division, labeled this the gentile branch (‘gentile’, frag. 7n, Varro, *Antiquitates*, p. 18).
- 46 See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.5.
- 47 Cf. De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1, pp. 455–6.
- 48 [Óláfr] lagði á þat allan hug at taka af heiðni ok fornar venjur, þær er honum þótti kristnispell í, *Heimskringla* vol. II, p. 73.
- 49 The older law of the Gúlaþing district, e.g., has a special paragraph on pagan sacrifices: ‘Pagan sacrifice is forbidden for us as well, and we should neither make sacrifices to a pagan god, nor to mounds nor to *horgar* [a kind of pagan holy place]. But if a man is known and proven to conduct such things, then he has forsaken every penny he owns. He must make confession and reconcile himself with Christ. But if he does not want to do that, he must leave the realm of our king’; ‘Blót er oss ok kviðjat at vér skulum eigi blóta heiðit goð né

hauga ne horga. En ef maðr verðr at því kunnr ok sannr þá hefir hann fyrirgert hverjum peningi fjár síns. Hann skal ganga til skripta ok boeta við Krist. En ef hann vill þat eigi, þá skal hann fara ór landeign konungs várs', *Older Law of the Gulaþing District*, p. 52. The Icelandic law *Grágás* has a similar prohibition: 'Men should put their faith in the one God and his saints and not make sacrifices to heathen beings. One sacrifices to heathen beings when one dedicates one's properties to others than God and his saints. If one makes sacrifices to pagan beings, it is punishable with lesser outlawry, and nine neighbors shall be called upon at the assembly'; 'Menn skulu trúa á Guð einn ok á helga menn til arnaðarorðs sér, ok blóta eigi heiðnar vættir. Þá blótar maðr heiðnar vættir er hann signar fé sitt qðrum en Guði ok helgum mǫnnum hans. Ef maðr blótar heiðnar vættir ok varðar þat fjorbaugsgarð ok skal kveðja heimilisbúa. ix. til á þingi', *Grágás* vol. II (*Staðarhólsbók*), p. 27; cf. vol. III (*Skálholtsbók*), pp. 24–5.

- 50 'Sás með Sygna ræsi | siðr, at blót eru kviðjuð', *Hallfreðar saga*, p. 159. Incidentally, Hallfreðr and the old law of the Gulaþing law district (quoted in the previous footnote) express this ban against sacrifices with the same words (blót er kviðjað/eru kviðjuð).
- 51 Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, p. 17.
- 52 According to *Heimskringla* vol. II, pp. 74, 77, 214, the abolition of this special arrangement was due to the special efforts of Óláfr Haraldsson.
- 53 Clunies Ross, 'Närvaron och frånvaron'.
- 54 See the argument in Wellendorf, 'The Attraction', as well as Jonas Wellendorf, 'The Wisdom of *Grímnismál*' (unpublished MS). The saga literature also contains less biased descriptions of pre-Christian cultic practices, such as divination (often referred to as 'ganga til fréttar', lit. 'go to questioning'), but these descriptions are given in such general terms that it is difficult to ascertain what kind of ritual procedure the authors and audiences envisioned. The preserved law codes forbid a number of pagan practices (see e.g. n. 50) without describing the procedures involved in great detail.
- 55 'Vendr þangat til ǫllum sínum átrúnaði ok heldr hann fyrir goð sinn leiðandi í sǫmu villi með sér bónda sinn ok bǫrn ok alt sitt hýski. Ok með fjandans krafti vex hann svá ok styrknar at hann má standa hjá húsfreyju ef hon vill', *Flateyjarbók* vol. II, p. 332.
- 56 'Þiggi mǫrnir þetta blœti', *Flateyjarbók* vol. II, pp. 333–5. The refrain is repeated nine times, but only fully written out twice. The name of the wished-for recipient(s) of the sacrifice is commonly normalized as 'mǫrnir' or 'mörnir'.
- 57 See Heizmann, 'Völsi', p. 541.
- 58 GkS 1005, col. 484, line 39. Because of this, Heizmann prefers to normalize the term as 'Maurnir': 'Im *Völsa þáttr* der *Flateyjarbók* steht jedoch "au" sonst immer für den Diphthong au, während q durch "o" oder "ó" wiedergegeben wird', Heizmann, 'Völsi', p. 540. I have retained the more traditional spelling with the hooked 'ö'.
- 59 Formally, it could be a masculine noun (ija-stem) in nom. sg. as well as a masculine or feminine noun in nom. pl. (i-stem). The verbal form *þiggi* is clearly

the third-person present subjunctive of *þiggja* ‘receive’ but the form does not unambiguously indicate number (singular or plural).

- 60 Steinsland and Vogt, ‘Aukin ertu uolse’, pp. 94–102. ‘Det vesentlige er at fallosen skal forenes med *mörnir*, jotunbruder, og at vi kan finne ritens mytiske modell i forholdet mellom guder og jotunkvinner’, *ibid.*, p. 100. Furthermore, Steinsland and Vogt, *ibid.*, pp. 91–2, see this story as a reflection of an old antagonism between masculine Óðinn cult and feminine fertility cult.
- 61 Steinsland, ‘Giants as Recipients of Cult’, has made a case for the worship of giants, female giants in particular.
- 62 See Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s.v. *siðr*.
- 63 See Weber, ‘Siðaskipti’.
- 64 *Flateyjarbók* vol. 1, pp. 577–83. On the name and function of this obscure deity, see Elmevik, ‘Aschw. Lytis-’.
- 65 McKinnell, ‘Two Sex-Goddesses’, pp. 280–5, has collected the material.
- 66 She is however mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* of the *Prose Edda*, where she is presented with the cognomen ‘Hölgabrúðr’ as the daughter of Hölgi, the eponymous king of Hálogaland. It is said that she sacrifices were made to her after her death. Later in the same text a Hölgabrúðr is mentioned among the names of giantesses, *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, pp. 60 and 112.
- 67 Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 247. ‘Denique in hoc omnia diis adtribuuntur, quae non modo in hominem, sed etiam quae in contemptissimum hominem cadere possunt’, *De civitate Dei* 6.5.
- 68 Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 184. ‘Dicit etiam de generationibus deorum magis ad poetas quam ad physicos fuisse populos inclinatos, et ideo et sexum et generationes deorum maiores suos, id est veteres Romanos et eorum constituisse coniugia’, *De civitate Dei* 4.32.
- 69 Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.6.
- 70 Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 250, does not hold back: ‘is anyone really content to ask or hope for eternal life from the gods of poets and theatres, games and plays? God forbid! Rather, may the true God turn aside from us such wild and sacrilegious madness! What? Are we to ask eternal life from gods who are pleased by games and plays, and who are placated by these things when their crimes are represented in them? No one, I suppose, is so insane as to cast himself into the abyss of such furious blasphemy; ‘placetne tandem vitam aeternam peti aut sperari ab diis poeticis theatricis, ludicris scaenis? Absit; immo avertat Deus verus tam inmanem sacrilegamque dementia. Quid? ab eis diis, quibus haec placent et quos haec placant, cum eorum illic crimina frequententur, vita aeterna poscenda est? Nemo, ut arbitror, usque ad tantum praecipitium furiosissimae impietatis insanit’, *De civitate Dei* 6.6.
- 71 Some examples of this will be given in [Chapter 2](#).
- 72 Kaplan, *Thou Fearful Guest*, is a monographic treatment of such tales.
- 73 See McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, for a book-length study of this phenomenon.
- 74 In a recent study of narrations of Greek myth, Johnston ties this dynamic aspect of characters and myths to their ‘plurimediality’: ‘by definition, a

- plurimedial character shimmers at the nexus of several, perhaps even many, different instantiations of that character taken from different texts, none of which have absolute authority over that character and any one of which may therefore dominate the others in the mind of the individual who creates it', Johnston, 'Narrating Myths', p. 208.
- 75 Cf. *Hymiskviða* st. 38, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 406.
- 76 De Vries, *The Problem of Loki*, p. 98.
- 77 The material is conveniently presented by Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Þórr's Fishing Expedition' and Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North*, pp. 31–50.
- 78 'Þórr kastaði hamrinum eptir honum, ok segja menn at hann lysti af honum hofuðit við grunninum. En ek hygg hitt vera þér satt at segja at Miðgarðsormr lifir enn ok liggir í umsjá', *Gylfaginning*, p. 45. The Uppsala manuscript of the *Prose Edda*, interestingly, leaves the question open by not including the last sentence.
- 79 Finally, *Ynglinga saga*, in *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 12, tells how Kvasir is given as a hostage from the Vanir to the Æsir following the great war between the two groups.
- 80 Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, p. 20.
- 81 *Prose Edda*, p. 22. 'Ok þat veit trúa mín at þetta mun veru mikill fróðleikr sá er hér kann skyn ok doemi hverir atburðir hafa orðit sér til hvers þessa nafns', *Gylfaginning*, p. 22. The polyonymy of the gods and its implications will be discussed in greater detail in [Chapter 5](#).
- 82 The significant drop in the use of mythological kennings in skaldic poetry in the eleventh century shows that the detachment of the two spheres was not wholly unproblematic and that skalds for a while found it opportune to avoid such kennings. See Abram, 'Einarr Skúlason', pp. 44–8, and Wills, 'The Development'.
- 83 Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 247. 'Sic alia, quae facilius intra parietes in schola quam extra in foro ferre possunt aures', *De civitate Dei* 6.5.
- 84 See e.g. Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End, Nongbri, Before Religion*, and, in a Scandinavian context, Lindberg, 'The Concept of Religion' and Nordberg, 'Continuity, Change', pp. 119–24.
- 85 Rives, *Religions in the Roman Empire*, pp. 13–14.
- 86 See Walter, *Lexikalisches Lehngut*, pp. 170–1.
- 87 Ljungberg, 'Trúa', p. 165.
- 88 See Watkins, *American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. leig⁻¹. An alternative etymology derives the term from PIE **leg-*. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire* vol. 11, pp. 267–73, discusses both terms and concludes in favor of **leg-*.
- 89 'religionum animum nodis exsolvere', Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.932.
- 90 'Hoc vinculo pietatis obstricti Deo et religati sumus; unde ipsa Religio nomen accepit', Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 4.28, col. 536A.
- 91 In this connection, it could also be mentioned that Old Norse *siðr*, discussed above, probably reflects a suffixal derivation of the Proto-Germanic root **sai-* (< PIE **sī-*) 'bind' (see Bammesberger, *Die Morphologie*, p. 159, and Bjorvand and Lindeman, *Våre arveord*, pp. 931–2).

- 92 Etymologically, *goð* probably comes from PIE **ǵhutóm* ‘that which is called, invoked’ while *áss* (the singular form of *Æsir*) comes from PIE **h₂énsus* ‘god, spirit’ and is cognate with Avestan *ahura-* (as in the designation Ahura-mazdāh, ‘the highest god/lord’). *Regin*, derived from PIE **h₂rēǵs* ‘ruler, king’ is cognate with English ‘regime’, ‘reign’, and Latin *rex*, Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction*, pp. 267 and 409–10.
- 93 Dronke, ‘Eddic Poetry as a Source’, p. 657.
- 94 Like the roots of the other god terms, the roots of *band* and *hapt* are inherited from PIE **bhendh-* ‘bind’ and **h₂ep-* ‘fasten, join’ respectively, see Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction*, p. 381.
- 95 Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, pp. 148–9.
- 96 *Gylfaginning*, p. 49, for instance, describes how the gods tie Loki with the intestines of one of his sons – this is also alluded to in *Lokasenna*, st. 49, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 418, and perhaps in *Völuspá*, st. 34, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, pp. 299–300 – and in the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng* st. 11, *Skj* AI, p. 18/BI, p. 16, the gods tie Loki and threaten to keep him in bonds unless he finds a way to free Iðunn, who had been abducted by the giant Þjazi with Loki’s help (*Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 32). *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 20, even claims that one may refer to Loki in poetry by calling him *inn bundni* ‘the bound one’, although this claim is not confirmed by the preserved poetic material. Furthermore, Óðinn somewhat bafflingly claims that he was fettered with the feathers (a pun in Old Norse as well as in English) of the heron of forgetfulness in the enclosure of Gunnlǫðr in *Hávamál* st. 13, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 324. The gods, of course, also succeeded in tying the monstrous wolf Fenrir, *Gylfaginning*, pp. 25 and 27–9. See also Dronke, ‘Eddic Poetry as a Source’, pp. 657–66.
- 97 Njǫrðr when one travels at sea or goes fishing, Freyr for prosperity and peace, Freyja in matters of love, Týr by men of valor and Ullr when one engages in single combat, *Gylfaginning*, pp. 23–6. See the discussion by van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, pp. 161–4. To this catalogue, one may add the minor goddesses whose domains or spheres of power are listed in a separate section in the *Gylfaginning*, pp. 29–30.
- 98 The god that binds is indeed a widespread theme across cultures; see Güntert, *Die arische Weltkönig*, Eliade, ‘The God who Binds’, and Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna*.
- 99 ‘Þat kann ek þriðja, | ef mér verðr þorð mikil | hapt við mína heiptmǫgu, | eggjar ek deyi | minna andskota, | bitat þeim vápn né vélir’, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 352.
- 100 This idea is reflected in the Valkyrie name Herfjotur (or Herfjotra) mentioned in *Grimnismál* st. 36, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 375, also cited in *Gylfaginning*, p. 30. Hǫrðr, the protagonist of *Harðar saga*, is thrice bound by war-fetters, but manages to free himself and escape: ‘Þá kom á Hörð herfjöturr, ok hjó hann af sér í fyrsta sinn ok annat. Í þriðja sinni kom á hann herfjöturrinn, ok þá gátu þeir kvíat hann ok slógu um hann hring, ok stökk hann enn út yfir hringinn ok vá áðr þrjá men’, *Harðar saga*, p. 87. ‘War-fetters then came onto Hǫrðr, and he freed himself the first and the second time. The war-fetters

came onto him a third time, and they [his enemies] were able to surround him and formed a circle around him, but having killed three men, he escaped from the enclosure once again' (author's translation).

101 Dronke, 'Eddic Poetry as a Source', p. 661.

102 West, *Indo-European Poetry*, pp. 488–9. In the *Iliad* 13.435–8, the god Poseidon causes the fall of the hero Alcaethous, 'for he cast a spell on his gleaming eyes and ensnared his glorious limbs so that he might neither fee backwards nor avoid the spear', Homer, *Iliad*, p. 35.

103 'Þat kann ek it fjórða | ef mér fyrðar bera | bõnd á boglimum: | svá ek gel, | at ek ganga má, | sprettr mér af fótum fjoturr, | en af hõndum hapt', *Eddukvæði*, vol. 1, p. 352. A close parallel to this spell is found in the post-classical Eddic poem *Grógaldur*: 'This is the fifth [incantation] I chant for you, if fetters are fixed upon your hands and feet: An incantation for loosing I will let be sung for you, and the lock springs from your limbs, and the fetters from your feet'; 'Þann gel ek þér fimmta, | ef þér fjoturr verðr | borinn at bóglimum: | leysigaldur læt ek þér | fyr legg of kveðinn, | ok stökkur þá láss af limum, | en af fótum fjoturr', st. 10, *Eddukvæði* vol. 11, p. 438.

104 This tribe probably lived on the eastern side of the middle part of the Elbe in Tacitus' day.

105 'Nemo nisi vinculo ligatus ingreditur, ut minor et potestatem numinis prae se ferens ... eoque omnis superstitio respicit, tamquam inde initia gentis, ibi regnator omnium deus, cetera subiecta atque parentia' (Tacitus, *Germania* 39.2). In his commentary to this passage (ad loc.), Lund sees the chains as an example of the world of the Germanic tribes as a *mundus inversus*. Whereas some Roman cults feature bound gods, it is the worshippers that are bound among the Germanic tribes.

106 The sacred grove of the Semnones is often compared the *fjoturlundur* 'fetter-grove' where, according to *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II st. 30, Dagr killed Helgi with a spear that Óðinn had lent him (see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar* vol. IV, p. 746). This has led to the identification of the god in the grove with Óðinn's South Germanic counterpart, Wotan (see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, pp. 73–4). However, the material does not provide sufficient detail to move beyond speculation at this point.

107 Marold, 'Die Skaldendichtung als Quelle', pp. 705–7. She excludes the instances where *bõnd* is used as a part of a kenning. A strictly mythological, as opposed to a cultic, use of the term *bõnd* is only found on one occasion (in *Haustlong* st. 17, *Skj* AI, p. 19/B1, p. 17). The first half-stanza describes how Hrungnir ended up standing on his shield: 'Brátt fló bjarga gæti | – bõnd ollu því – randa | (ímun) fõlr und iljar | íss (vildi svá dísir).

108 Eyjólfur Dáðason, *Bandadrápa*, p. 468.

109 It is impossible on a purely morphological basis to determine whether *gøð-* is singular or plural in this context, but given the emphasis placed on the collective of the gods here and elsewhere in the poem, it is reasonable to assume that *gøðvariðr* should be interpreted as a 'protected by (the) gods' rather than 'protected by a/the god'.

- 110 See Fidjestøl, ‘Pagan Beliefs’, who cites the sixteen attested occurrences of this notion in an appendix. Note that Fidjestøl misidentifies the recipient of *Bandadrápa* and states that it was composed for Eiríkr blóðøx rather than Eiríkr Hákonarson.
- 111 As Marold, ‘Die Skaldendichtung als Quelle’, p. 705, has observed, *bond* appears in particular in connection with the verb *reka* ‘drive (out), banish’.
- 112 ‘Svá skyldi goð gjalda | gram reki bond af lǫndum, | reið sé rogn ok Óðinn | rǫn míns féar hǫnum; folkmygi lát flyja, | Freyr ok Njörðr, af jörðum | leiðisk lofða stríði | landóss, þanns vé grandar’, *Egils saga*, p. 163.

2 The Hierarchy of Disbeliefs in Antipagan Polemics

- 1 See Wellendorf, ‘The Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions’.
- 2 Faulkes, ‘Pagan Sympathy’.
- 3 Dronke and Dronke, ‘The Prologue of the *Prose Edda*’, p. 153.
- 4 Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms’.
- 5 By comparing Nachor’s speech with a speech given by Barlaam earlier in the saga, on pp. 12–20, one sees that the attitude of *Barlaams saga* toward paganism is far from consistent, for Barlaam, in his speech, liberally applies demonology.
- 6 Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 20–5, presents arguments that suggest it might have been written after the Roman conquest of Alexandria (in 30 BCE), perhaps in the reign of Caligula (37–41 CE).
- 7 ‘φευδεπιγραφος ... legit ... Ecclesia sed inter canonicas scripturas non recipit ... legat ad aedificationem plebis, non ad auctoritatem ecclesiasticorum dogmatum confirmandam’, *Vulgata*, p. 957.
- 8 See Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 67.
- 9 *PL* 109, pp. 671–2. Today, Wisdom is generally considered apocryphal by Protestants, while the Catholic Church has held Wisdom to be inspired, and thus canonical, since the Council of Trent (1545–63).
- 10 Smelik and Hemelrijk, ‘Who Knows Not What Monsters’, present an impressive compilation of textual materials. One notable example is found in Lucian’s *The Parliament of the Gods*. In this (humorous) dialogue, the gods have gathered in order to discuss whether they shall rid their assembly of deities unworthy of their name. Momus, a personification of mockery, ridicules (among many others) the animal-headed Egyptian deities (§10).
- 11 ‘sed tamen adhuc in his minor est querella | et hii fortassis errant Deum quaerentes et volentes invenire ... iterum autem nec his debet ignosci | si enim tantum potuerunt scire ut possent aestimare saeculum | quomodo huius Dominum non facilius invenerunt’, Sap. 13:6–9, *Vulgata*, p. 1018.
- 12 ‘infandorum enim idolorum cultura omnis mala causa est et initium et finis’, Sap. 14:27, *Vulgata*, p. 1020.
- 13 Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 248.
- 14 ‘omnes enim insipientes et infelices supra modum animae superbi sunt | inimici populi tui et imperantes illi’, Sap. 15:14, *Vulgata*, p. 1021.

- 15 Of the ten plagues of Egypt, the second, third, fourth, and eighth are directly associated with various kinds of animals.
- 16 This explanation was elaborated in later sources, such as Fulgentius' *Mythologies* 1.1, pp. 15–17, and in the proem of the Third Vatican Mythographer, p. 132. In these texts, the grieving father is identified as a certain Egyptian by the name of Sirophanes or Syrophanes.
- 17 'multitudo autem adducta per speciem operis | eum qui ante tempus homo honoratus fuerat | nunc deum existimaverunt', Sap. 14:20, *Vulgata*, p. 1020.
- 18 Closely related to Wisdom's description of the kinds of disbelief are chapters 13–16 of Philo of Alexandria's *On the Decalogue*, pp. 35–49.
- 19 'Þrír hlutir eggjuðu menn í fyrstunni mest fram at dýrka ok stunda upp á þessháttar líkneski eptir því sem ritat er í Libro Sapientie. Hit fyrsta var ástúð ok elskhugi lífandi manna við sína frændr ok vini, svá sem fyrr nefndr Ninus gerði við sinn fõður Belum. Annat var ótti ok einurð við þá konunga sem þat vildu gjarna gera eða fram fara. Hit þriðja var hagleikr ok vandvirktr smiðanna þeira er líkneskin gerðu ok pentuðu eðr grõfu svá at menn lýsti at líta þau ok sjá þar upp á, *Stjórn*, p. 102.
- 20 'vt autem in libro Sapientie legitur, ad imaginum huiusmodi cultum prouocauerunt homines tria, scilicet affectio erga morientes, timor & adulatio erga reges, diligentia artificum in sculpendo & depingendo imagines', Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, p. 37. Astås's edition of *Stjórn* traces the sources used by the author.
- 21 Schmidt, 'Polytheisms', pp. 10–14.
- 22 See Volk, *Die Schriften* vol. 1, pp. 122–35.
- 23 A critical version of the Greek novel has recently been published under the title *Historia animae utilis de Barlaam et Ioasaph*. The Greek legend is now commonly dated to the late tenth century and ascribed to the Georgian scholar Euthymius of Athos.
- 24 See Astås, 'Den eldste bevarte'.
- 25 The anthology *Barlaam i nord*, edited by Johansson and Arvidsson, may change this.
- 26 The transcription of the main manuscript, Holm perg. fol. 6, runs to almost 200 dense pages in Rindal's edition of *Barlaams saga*.
- 27 See Astås, 'Romantekst på vandring'.
- 28 Wellendorf, 'The Attraction'.
- 29 Reed, 'Heresiology and Identity'.
- 30 'Nachor ... tók þá at mæla af því efni [< einn] er hann vissi eigi, svá sem ásnir Barlaams [*recte* Balaams] er þegar vissi ok varð at mæla er Guð vildi', *Barlaams saga*, p. 120.
- 31 *Barlaams saga*, pp. 120–34.
- 32 'Hugleidda ek með mér heimsins margfaldligan búnað ... ok þá er ek leit þessa alla hluti með athygli, þá sýndisk mér sem þessir allir hlutir hróerask ok endhróerask, snúask aptr ok fram, upp ok niðr, vaxa ok þverra til þeirra þurfta ok nauðsynja sem þeir eru til skipaðir, ok skilda ek þann er skapaði ... at hann er sannr Guð', *Barlaams saga*, pp. 120–1.

- 33 Nachor is described as ‘completely identical with him [Barlaam] as regards appearance and age – a hermit steadfast in our faith – so that scarcely anyone can be found who will be able to tell the two apart, Barlaam and that other man’; ‘alla vega honum [Barlaam] líkan, bæði at ásýn ok aldri, einsetumann með staðfastri várri trú, svá at varla má sá finnask er kenna megi hvárn fyrir annan, Barlaam ok þann’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 92.
- 34 Alternatively, one could see it as an ideal, divinely inspired representation of how one can infer from creation the existence of God.
- 35 ‘Hann er bæði fyrir útan upphaf ok niðrlag, ódauðligr, eilíflið, allsvaldandi, enskis þurfandi, yfir öllum hlutum, ekki þat hafandi er hans máttur megi minka af. Ekki fylgir honum óvit eða vanngæzla, engi reiði eða bráðlyndi, engi gleyming eða gáleysi, því at eptir hans forsjá verðr alt at vera. Engi þörf er honum at þiggja hvarki fé né fornir ok ekki þat annat er mannlig augu megu sjá, en hans þörfu þó allir’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 121.
- 36 *Barlaams saga*, p. 132.
- 37 ‘Þessir váru höfðingjar ok herrar at vísdóm ok vitrleik fyrir flestum þjóðum’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 121.
- 38 The Chaldeans worship the elements (*höfuðskepnur*): ‘Miklu falsi ok hégóma fylgja þessir Chaldei í sinni trú’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 122. The Greeks worship men and women (*Karlmenn ok konur*): ‘þeirra ... trú er heimskari en átrúnaðr Chaldeorum’, *ibid.*, p. 125. The Egyptians worship mute creatures (*Dumb kvikvendi*): ‘Egiptulands folk er bæði fólskari ok heimskari en allar aðrar þjóðir í sinni villu’, *ibid.*, p. 129.
- 39 ‘En þeir sem goða dýrka ok á trúa þá er þeirra átrúnaðr með þrennum háttum’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 121.
- 40 They ‘vildu eigi vita Guð. Kusu heldr at dýrka höfuðskepnur enn þeirra skapara’, *Barlaams saga*, p. 121.
- 41 ‘meira vald ok máttur fylgir þeim er gætir enn hinum er gætt eru þar af’, *Barlaams saga*, pp. 121–2.
- 42 ‘Caldei nanque, nescientes Deum, errauerunt post elementa et ceperunt colere creaturam potius quam suum creatorem’, *Barlaam et Josaphat*, p. 398. The Greek text of the Barlaam legend agrees with the Latin at this point: ‘The Chaldeans, ignorant of God, erred following the elements’; ‘Οἱ μὲν γὰρ Χαλδαῖοι μὴ εἰδότες θεὸν ἐπλανήθησαν ὀπίσω τῶν στοιχείων’, *Historia animae utilis* vol. II, p. 265.
- 43 ‘They would not mention God. And who would then tell their sons about the magnificent works of God? It came to the point that they forgot God and that [not even] a [single] man could not be found throughout the world who knew about his creator’; ‘Þeir vildu eigi nefna Guð. En hverr mundi þá frá segja sonum þeira frá Guðs stórmerkjum. Svá kom at þeir týndu Guðs nafni ok víðaz um veröldina fannsk eigi sá maðr er deili kunni á skapara sínum’, *Prologus*, p. 3.
- 44 *Barlaams saga*, p. 123.
- 45 ‘Ok vofðusk Kalldei of mjök í þessari villu ok í sinni hégómligri trú, elska ok fága ok fyrir goð hafa fauska ok fúnaða hluti ok dauðligar líkneskjur ok hafa

- eigi til þess vit eða vilja at sjá ok skilja at eigi eru þetta goð nema heldr Guðs sköpna ok sjálfs hans gerð', *Barlaams saga*, p. 125.
- 46 'Errone igitur magno errauerunt Caldei post opinionones suas: colunt corruptibilia elementa et mortuas statuas et non sentiunt ista deos facientes', *Barlaam et Josaphat*, p. 149.
- 47 The Greek names of the gods have in most cases been replaced by Roman names. Greek names are used for Asclepius (whose Roman name is Aesculapius) and Ganymede (whose Roman name was Catamitus).
- 48 'Jupiter er Þórr er kallaðr; hinn sami Þórr hefir snúið sik í elding fyrir ástar sakir; Þórr drap hann [*sc.* Asclepius] með einni elding', *Barlaams saga*, pp. 125, 126, 127.
- 49 'nonner', *Barlaams saga*, p. 126
- 50 'Lifðu fúlsliga ok ferliga', *Barlaams saga*, p. 125. In its original formulation, euhemerism implies deification of humans because of their benefactions. See the discussion of euergetism in connection with euhemerism in Winiarczyk, *The Sacred History*, pp. 41–6. Isidore also stresses this in his treatment of the gods of the heathens in *Etymologies* 8.9.
- 51 'Ok dýrka fyrir því svá fúllífa goði at þeir megi í því líkjask eptir dæmum goða sinna í hórdómum ok saurlífi ok margskýns öðrum ferligum verkum', *Barlaams saga*, pp. 126–7.
- 52 'En af slíkarri villu ok því líkri hófusk með mönnum manndrap ok bardagar, hertekjur ok landauðnir storar', *Barlaams saga*, p. 125.
- 53 'Heyr hégómliga trú ok mikit fals! Þeir sá goði sína etna ok eydda, drepna ok deydda, brenda ok bálaða ok feyða ok skildu þó eigi sjalfir, skynlausir menn, at goðlausir eru slíkir goðir er hvárki megu sér né öðrum hjalpa', *Barlaams saga*, p. 130.
- 54 'Isis was unable to help herself or to save Osiris, her husband and brother, neither was Osiris able to help himself. Typhon, the fratricide, was also unable to protect himself against the plan of Horus, his nephew, and the plots of Isis, his sister and the wife of his brother [in the translation the names have been given in their traditional forms]'; 'mátti eigi Usis hjalpa eða bjarga Osurin bónda sínum ok bróður, eigi mátti ok Usiris sjálfr hjalpa sér. Tiphon bróðurbana fekk ok eigi frjálsa sik fyrir ráði Orus, bróðursonar síns ok afráðum Usidis, systur sinnar ok bróðurkona', *Barlaams saga*, p. 129.
- 55 The story is referred to by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* 5.321–30.
- 56 'Mikilli villu ok vantrú vólkuðusk egiptar ok chaldei ok svá girkir er slíka goði lofuðu ok gøfguðu, ok heldu svá hégómlega hluti sér fyrir goð. Reistu þeim upp til tignar líkneskjur gylltar ok grafnar, hverr sem líkast sínum goði. Týndu erfiði ok tpuðu starfi ok kostnaði. Lúttu ok lofuðu þeim goðum er hvárki máttu gótt gefa eða þiggja', *Barlaams saga*, p. 130.
- 57 See Andersson, 'Lore and Literature'.
- 58 *Barlaams saga*, pp. 125, 130, 131.
- 59 'sögur, rím eða rœður, ljóð eða kvæði ... er þat sögur, en ekki annat', *Barlaams saga*, p. 131. The Latin text adds that it is possible to interpret the stories allegorically: 'Nam etsi fabulose de ipsis sunt hystorie, nichil sunt nisi tantum

modo uerba; si uero phisici, non iam dii sunt, qui ista fecerunt et passi sunt; si autem allegorica, fabule sunt et non aliud aliquid', *Barlaam et Josaphat*, p. 153.

- 60 'Af þessu skildu þeir svá at jörðin væri kvik ok hefði lif með nökkurum hætti, ok vissu þeir at hon var furðuliga gømul at aldartali ok máttug í eðli. Hon fœddi öll kykvendi hon eignaðisk þat er dó. Fyrir þá sök gáfu þeir henni nafn ok töldu ætt sína', *Prologus*, p. 2.
- 61 Strerath-Bolz, 'Sprache und Religion', and others have observed that the *Prologus* in general refrains from mentioning pagan worship.
- 62 Wellendorf, 'Middelalderlige perspektiver'.
- 63 The most famous is probably that of Caesar, *Bellum gallicum* 6.21, 1–2 – this passage will also be discussed in [Chapter 3](#) – who considers the nature worship of the Germani to be a primitive form of religiosity. Caesar contrasts the Germanic peoples with the Celtic, writing: 'The customs of the Germanic peoples differ greatly from these [Celtic customs]. For they have neither druids who are in charge of godly matters nor do they perform sacrifices. They only consider those as gods whom they can see and through whose powers they are manifestly helped, Sun and Fire, and Moon. They have not even heard rumors of the remaining gods'; 'Germani multum ab hac consuetudine differunt. Nam neque druides habent, qui rebus diuinis praesint, neque sacrificiis student. Deorum numero eos solos ducunt, quos cernunt et quorum aperte opibus iuuantur, Solem et Vulcanum et Lunam, reliquos ne fama quidem acceperunt', Caesar, *Bellum gallicum*, p. 99. The trustworthiness of Caesar's account is, however, highly debatable, in particular because it disagrees with that of the better-informed Tacitus and primarily seems to be infused by the ethnographic commonplaces that classical authors used to describe barbarians.
- 64 See Andrén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology*, pp. 117–68.
- 65 On the solar mythological school, which flourished among Scandinavian scholars of a philological comparative orientation around the turn of the twentieth century and its archaeological *Nachleben*, see Nordberg, *Fornnordisk religionsforskning*, pp. 203–32.
- 66 The Old Norse 'sun' word (*sól*) is a feminine noun. It is therefore assumed that the sun is a goddess rather than a god. The examples use both the generic 'god' word, *goð* n., which can refer to male as well as female deities and the gender-specific *gyðja* f., which refers to a goddess.
- 67 'skínanda goð', *Grímnismál* st. 38 and *Sigrdrífumál* st. 16, 'skírleitt goð', *Grímnismál* st. 39, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 375, vol. II, p. 316, vol. I, p. 375.
- 68 'The divinely mild bedfellow of Glenr [the sun] moves shining into the sanctuary of the goddess. Then comes from above the good light of the gray-clad moon'; 'Glens beðja veðr gyðju | guðblið í vé, síðan | ljós kemr gott með geislum | gránserks ofan Mána', *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, p. 39.
- 69 Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, *Blót í norrænum sið*, pp. 117–33. His main point, that the sentence 'er sólu var ofrat' in one manuscript of *Laxdæla saga*, p. 149, should be taken to mean 'when sacrifice to the sun was made' rather than 'when the sun rose' (as it is usually understood) remains unconvincing.

- 70 De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1, pp. 355–61.
- 71 *Flateyjarbók* vol. 1, p. 21. The name Þorri is generally taken to mean ‘the dry one’ and is also the traditional designation for the period from mid January to mid February. In an astronomical/computistic text in GkS 1812 4to, the month-name Þorri is explained as follows: ‘Thereupon the sun moves into the sign of the water bearer [i.e. Aquarius]. That happens three nights before the feast of St. Agnes [i.e. January 21]. This month is considered rainless by people in southern lands. We call it Þorri. And the reason for naming the month after the one who guards the water, is that the waters in the sky are most sealed. Here they are sealed by ice’; ‘Eptir þat gengr sól fyr vatnberamerki. Þar kemr hon. iij. náttum fyr Agnesmessu. Þann mánuð telja menn á suðrlöndum vera óskúrsaman. Þann kollum vér þorra. Ok skyldi af því kenna mánuðinn við þann mann er vatnsins gætr at þá eru vatnin mest lokin, þau er í himninum eru. En hér eru lokin með ísum’, *Aldsta delen af Cod. 1812 4to*, p. 35.
- 72 The name Fornjótr is also included in *Skáldskaparmál’s* versified list of giant names, vol. 1, p. 111. See also Clunies Ross, ‘Snorri Sturluson’s Use’, Meulengracht Sørensen, ‘The Sea, the Flame’, and Ashman Rowe, ‘Origin Legends’. In this family, it is only the progenitor Fornjótr ‘the ancient man/being’, so Hellquist, ‘Om Fornjótr’, whose name is not intimately connected with a force of nature.
- 73 Legendary accounts of peoples in the far north of Scandinavia do not always distinguish clearly between giants and Saami (Hermann Pálsson, *Úr land-norðri*, pp. 14–27 *et pass.*). The Saami, like the giants, were closely associated with the wintry forces of nature as the names of characters like King Snjá ‘Snow’ the Old and his daughter Drífa ‘Snow drift’ with whom the Swedish Yngling king Vanlandi, according to *Ynglinga saga*, in *Heimskringla* vol. 1, pp. 28–9, spends a winter.
- 74 ‘Þat er ár þeira’, *Flateyjarbók* vol. 1, p. 21.
- 75 Motz, ‘The Ruler of the Mountains’ and ‘Gods and Demons’, discusses giants in terms of ‘gods of the wilderness’ and ‘rulers of the mountains’ and also lists giant names connected with the forces of nature. See also De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1, pp. 242–3, who, following von Sydow, *Jättarna i mytologi*, concludes his brief discussion by stating (contrary to Motz) that there was no room in pre-Christian Scandinavia for a cult of giants.
- 76 See Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum*, Præf. III. In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr munkr, p. 289, giants (*risar*) are also associated with the remote Norwegian past.
- 77 *Heimskringla* vol. 1, pp. 22–5. The description of the worship of Óðinn in the same saga is more ambivalent because of this god’s association with wizardry.
- 78 ‘Hann tók þá øxi mikla. Hann gekk þá at Frey ok mælti til hans: “Nu skal prófa þig, Freyr, ef þú mátt mæla, þá svara mér.” En Freyr þagði. “Ef þú, Freyr,” segir konungr, “mátt eigi eðr vill eigi svara mér, svari sá er í þér er ok þik hefir lengi magnat. En ef hvárgi ykkar má nú nokkut at hafask, þú né fjandinn þá skilsk mér at sannr Guð, sá er vér trúum á kristnir menn, hafi fyrirdrift ykkar báða, ok því skal ek með hans miskunn ok mínu megni eyða ok afmá ok at nauðgum

yðr niðrbrjóta allan yðvarn krapt.” Freyr þagði þá enn. Konungr mælti: “En er til þín at tala, Freyr, ef þú hefir megn at gefa monnum afl eða orku, hlífðu þér nú.” ... Konungr hóf þá upp oxina ok hjó hönd af Frey, en Freyr brá ekki við. Konungr hjó þá högg hvert at qðru þar til hann hafði líkneskju þessa límat alla í sundr’, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* vol. III, pp. 3–4.

79 *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* vol. III, pp. 5–6.

80 See Wellendorf, ‘The Æsir and Their Idols’ for further examples.

81 ‘Höfðu flestir þat fyrir satt, at Brandr hefði átrúnað á Faxe’, *Vatnsdæla saga*, p. 90.

82 Cf. *Hrafnkels saga*’s account of Hrafnkell’s horse, which is also named Freyfaxi: ‘Hrafnkell had that precious possession which seemed to him better than all others. That was a grey horse with a black stripe down the back which he called his Freyfaxi, he gave half that horse to Freyr, his friend’; ‘Hrafnkell átti þann grip í eigu sinni, er honum þótti betri en annarr. Þat var hestr brún-móalótttr at lit, er hann kallaði Freyfaxa sinn. Hann gaf Frey, vin sínum, þann hest hálfan’, *Hrafnkels saga*, p. 100.

83 Ström, ‘Tro och blot’, p. 23. See also Steinsland and Vogt, ‘Aukin ertu uolse’.

84 On cows in Old Norse literature and myth, see Uspenskij, ‘Towards Further Interpretation’, who focuses on the primordial cow Auðhumbla. Schröder, ‘Germanische Schöpfungsmythen II’, pp. 81–9, treats the wider comparative context.

85 Rosén, ‘Freykult’, pp. 236–43, argues for a close association of the god Freyr and the ox, but his examples are mainly examples of oxen being sacrificed rather than worshipped.

86 The minor goddess Beyla is characterized as a *deigja* ‘milkmaid’ in *Lokasenna* st. 56 (the only text in which she is mentioned), *Eddukvæði* vol. I, p. 419. Her name is commonly connected with *baula*, an Old Norse word for a cow (although Dumézil, ‘Two Minor Scandinavian Gods’, pp. 102–5, etymologized her name as **biu-ilō*, a diminutive of the word for bee). It should also be mentioned that, according to Tacitus, the cart of Nerthus was drawn by cows (‘bubus feminis’, *Germania* 40.3).

87 *FAS* vol. I, p. 258.

88 ‘Þeir höfðu átrúnað mikinn á einni kú, ok kolluðu þeir hana Síbilju. Hún var svá mjök blótin, at menn máttu eigi standask lát hennar. Ok því var konungr vanr, þá er hers var ván, at þessi kýr in sama var fyrir fylkingum’, *FAS* vol. I, p. 242.

89 *FAS* vol. I, p. 259. The same saga also describes the bovine veneration of the inhabitants of Hvítabœr, *ibid.*, p. 241.

90 *Flatneyjarbók* vol. I, p. 375.

91 *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, pp. 366–8.

92 *Kristni saga*, pp. 7–8. A more elaborate version of this story, that also contains a demonological perspective, is found in *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla* I, pp. 60–8.

93 ‘Eyvindr ... nam Flatneyjardal upp til Gunnsteina ok blotaði þá’, *Landnámabók*, p. 273. ON *gunnr* generally means ‘war, strife’, but it is unclear how the name Gunnsteinar was understood.

- 94 'Þórir nam ... Hnjóskadal allan til Ódeilu ok bjó at Lundi; hann blótaði lundinn', *Landnámabók*, p. 273.
- 95 'Þorsteinn rauðnefr var blótmaðr mikill; hann blótaði forsinn, ok skyldi bera leifar allar á forsinn ... En þá nótt, er hann andaðisk, rak sauðinn allan í forsinn', *Landnámabók*, p. 358.
- 96 Aspirations to find one such theory have been declared 'astonishingly unrealistic', Pals, *Eight Theories*, p. 310.

3 Universalist Aspirations in *Hauksbók*

- 1 *Hauksbók* now consists of three separate parts, each of which has its own shelf mark: AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, and AM 675 4to. A diplomatic edition of *Hauksbók* was published by Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is found on pp. 156–64 of that edition. This is still the standard edition of many of the texts from *Hauksbók*, and I have relied on it throughout. I have additionally consulted the facsimile edition edited by Jón Helgason. An earlier edition of fols. 1–14 of AM 544 4to, the section in which *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* is found, was published by Jón Þorkelsson, *Nokkur blöð*. No English translation of the text appears to have been published, and the translation included in Szurszewski's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Ælfric's *De falsis diis*', pp. 254–66, is not reliable.
- 2 Old Norse translators generally chose Latin and French/Anglo-Norman exemplars. The corpus of translations from Old English includes, in addition to *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, the sermon beginning *Hinn helgi byskup er heitir Augustinus* in *Hauksbók*, pp. 167–70, which appears to be an Old Norse reworking of Ælfric's *De auguries*, see Reichborn-Kjennerud, 'Et kapi-tel av Hauksbók', and a text in *Gamla norsk homilieboek*, edited under the title *Oratio dominica*, pp. 153–9, this text is not rubricated in the manuscript. *Oratio dominica* appears to be a relatively close translation of Ælfric's *Feria III de dominica oration*, *Catholic Homilies* 1.19. See Hjelde, 'Norsk preken', pp. 380–96 on *Oratio dominica*.
- 3 Examples include Taylor, '*Hauksbók* and Ælfric's *De falsis diis*', Szurszewski, 'Ælfric's *De falsis diis*', pp. 117–50, Lombardi, 'The Travel of a Text', Kick, 'Old Norse Translations', and Ferrari, 'Ælfric in Islanda'. See Wellendorf, 'Orð æftir orðe', on the methodological issues.
- 4 'es [handelt] sich um den Versuch, konkrete Formen der Götzenverehrung und eine drohenden Rückfall ins Heidentum zu verhindern', Strerath-Bolz, *Kontinuität statt Konfrontation*, p. 60.
- 5 Lombardi, 'The Travel of a Text'.
- 6 The very fact that the translator had access to and was able to understand an Old English exemplar increases the likelihood of an early date, but not necessarily so early that it dates from the conversion period. Indeed, the Old English text continued to be copied well after the end of the Old English period proper (conventionally dated to 1066), and textual witnesses (MSS CCCC 303 and CUL 11.1.33) are held to date from the middle and second half

of the twelfth century respectively; see Irvine, ‘The Compilation and the Use of Manuscripts’, pp. 45–8 and 54–5. In general, scholars of Old Norse rarely date texts before the early twelfth century, and the oldest manuscripts (while difficult to date) are commonly held to date from around 1150.

- 7 See, e.g., Taylor, ‘*Hauksbók* and Ælfric’s *De falsis diis*’, p. 108, and Townend, *Language and History*, p. 133, and the otherwise eminently well-informed Hall, ‘Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons’, p. 681. The same assumption appears to be implicit in Sverrir Jakobsson’s analysis, ‘*Hauksbók* and the Construction’, though he discusses the entirety of the manuscript preserving the text rather than the text itself. The most recent work on *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, Ferrari’s ‘Ælfric in Islanda’, keeps this misconception alive as well. See also Pope, *The Homilies of Ælfric* vol. II, pp. 669–70, and Abram, ‘Anglo-Saxon Influence’, pp. 7–8.
- 8 *Hauksbók*, pp. xx–xxxi.
- 9 Although there are parallels between *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and *Prologus* to the *Prose Edda*, they are not verbal and can easily be explained by positing that both texts drew on a widespread tradition. See Strerath-Bolz, *Kontinuität statt Konfrontation*, pp. 57–60, for a discussion of the relationship between *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and *Prologus*.
- 10 The text, Ferrari asserts, ‘Ælfric in Islanda’, p. 20, is written ‘nella volontà di mostrare la grandezza di Dio, manifestata nella storia della salvezza, e la stoltezza di chi si allontana dalla vera fede’.
- 11 The untitled text with the incipit *Hinn helgi byskup er heitir Augustinus* and *Um imbrudagahald*, *Hauksbók*, pp. 167–8 and 172–4.
- 12 See e.g. Wellendorf, ‘Lærdomsitteratur’, p. 312–13.
- 13 ‘Beloved brothers, the Sacred Scriptures tell us how we should believe in our Lord; ‘Ljúfir bræðr, svá segja oss helgar ritningar hversu vér skulum á dróttinn várn trúa’, *Hauksbók*, p. 156. As an example of a similar opening from the Norwegian Book of Homilies, one might mention *De ammonitione bona*, which opens with the following words: ‘Dear brothers, I would like to tell you that it is of great necessity for us that we turn to Our Lord with all our mind and heart’; ‘Kærir bræðr, ek vil segja yðr at oss er mikil nauðsyn at vér hverfim til várs dróttins með öllum hug ok hjarta’, *Gamla norsk homiliebok*, p. 65.
- 14 ‘We may now in word and in deed and in our tribulation and almsgiving bring about that we should be with God and his saints in light and in happiness when we leave this place, if we wish to do the will of God’; ‘Vér megum nú með orði ok með verki ok með erfiði váru ok ölmusu til þess gera at vér skyldum með Guð vera ok hans helgum mönnum í ljósi ok í fagnaði er vér héðan förum ef vér viljum Guðs vilja gera’, *Hauksbók*, p. 157.
- 15 This conclusion differs strikingly from that of the Old English source, where we read: ‘There is no other god and no other creator than the Holy Trinity, that is God who rules in glory, he is the one ruler of all creation and repays each man according to his deeds when this world ends, and occasionally before. Our savior spoke thus to his holy servants: *Ego dixi, dii estis, et filii Excelsi omnes*: I say that you are gods, and all sons of the Highest. The mild-hearted

Lord gave such great honor to his holy servants, that he called them gods; nevertheless, no man has any might through himself, only through the one God who created all things. Let there be honor and glory to him forever. AMEN'; 'Nis nan oðer god, ne nan oðer scyppend, buton seo halige Þrynnys, þe es þrymwealdend God, se ðe ána gewylt ealra gesceafta, and ælcum men forgylt eft be his weorcum on þissere weorolde geendunge, and eac hwilon ær. Ure Hælend cwæð swaþeah be his halgum þegnum, *Ego dixi, dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes*: Ic cwæð þæt ge synd godas, and ealle suna þæs Hehstan. Swa micilne wurðmynt forgeaf se mildheorta Drihten his halgum þegnum, þæt he hét hi godas; ac nan mann næfð swaþeah nane mihte þurh hine sylfne, buton of þam ánum Gode þe ealle þing gesceóp, þam sy wuldor and lofa to worulde. AMEN', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 712.

- 16 Additional support for this suggestion will be presented in the section on the manuscript context of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*.
- 17 The last two stories, 'Daniel and Bel' and 'Daniel and the Dragon', are first found in the Septuagint and are considered apocryphal by Protestants and deuterocanonical by Catholics and Orthodox Christians.
- 18 (1) *Hauksbók*, p. 156, line 15–p. 157, line 17; (2) *ibid.*, p. 157, line 17–p. 159, line 27; (3) *ibid.*, p. 159, line 27–p. 161, line 8; (4) *ibid.*, p. 161, lines 8–16; (5a) *ibid.*, p. 161, line 17–p. 162, line 10; (5b) *ibid.*, p. 162, lines 11–p. 163, line 9; (5c) *ibid.*, p. 163, line 9–p. 164, line 20; (6) *ibid.*, p. 164, lines 20–34.
- 19 More commonly referred to as *De correctione rusticorum*. Martin of Braga's sermon is prefaced by a letter to the effect that he composed the sermon at the request of bishop Polemius of Astorga (in Léon, Spain) who needed a short piece of writing 'on the origin of idols', *de origine idolorum*, that he could use 'for the castigation of the rustics', *pro castigatione rusticorum*, p. 70. Martin of Braga's own personal efforts of correction/castigation were primarily directed toward the Sueves who converted from Arianism to Catholicism in Martin's episcopacy. The depth of his knowledge of the pagan practices of the rustics is unknown, and some hold that it was quite shallow, e.g.: 'It seems that Martin's themes were a reaction to his own fears and worries which were influenced by the traditional and canonical literature on paganism and superstitions, rather than being an accurate reflection of Galician rural paganism', Hen, 'Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*', p. 36. Hen repeats this view on p. 46: 'These texts [Martin of Braga's *Pro castigatione rusticorum* and related texts] suggest not so much the survival of pagan customs, still less idolatrous worship among Christians, as the use of a literary topos for the description of paganism in an attempt to define and illustrate what is Christian.'
- 20 See Hen, 'Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*'.
- 21 Martin's text, in turn, is held to be heavily indebted to Augustine's *De cat-echizandis rudibus*, Martin of Braga, *Pro castigatione rusticorum*, pp. 13–15. In some instances, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* agrees with *De correctione rusticorum* against *De falsis diis* (one example is given in n. 33), and scholars therefore occasionally assume that the Norse translator had access to the Latin text as well as the Old English one.

- 22 Johnson, 'Euhemerisation versus Demonisation', argued that Ælfric toned down the demonological perspective found in Martin of Braga's text, writing that 'contrary to his model, Martin of Braga, Ælfric stops short of demonizing the pagan gods', p. 54. Although it is correct that Ælfric left out some of Martin's references to demons, the demonological understanding of pagan gods still dominates in his text, whose central stance is that 'the deceiving devil, who tricks humankind, led the heathens into such profound error that they established such foul men as gods for themselves who loved the vices that are pleasing to the devil'; 'Se syrwienda deofol, þe swicað embe mancyn, gebrohte þa hæþenan on þæt healice gedwyld, þæt hi swa fúle menn him fundon to godum, þe þa leahtras lufodan, þe liciað þam deofle', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, pp. 685–6. This perspective is carried on in the Old Norse text.
- 23 Ælfric draws materials from Rufinus' *Historia ecclesiastica* and *Historia tripartita* attributed to Cassiodorus, so Pope, *The Homilies of Ælfric* vol. II, p. 670. The Old Norse *Stjórn*, pp. 249–50, cf. p. 164, drawing on *Speculum historiale*, lib. I, cap. 131, gives an elaborate account of the origin of Serapis and his cult and idol but does not mention its destruction.
- 24 This story, which, like the previous one, appears to be drawn from Rufinus, see Pope, *The Homilies of Ælfric* vol. II, p. 671, is also found in the Old Norse *Barlaams saga*, pp. 56–8. The anecdote appears to have been interpolated in the Old Norse version of the Barlaam legend and is not found in any other known version of this legend, so Haugen, 'Forteljingane i forteljinga', pp. 58–9.
- 25 'þa ure Hælend Crist com to þisse weorulde on þære sixtan ylde', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 704.
- 26 Ælfric explains: 'our Lord's faith extinguished heathendom because Christianity came far and wide'; 'ure Drihtnes geleafa adwæscete þæt hæþengild, for þan þe se Cristendóm côm gehwær and þær', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 711.
- 27 The nature of the material does not allow one to determine at which stage of the creation/transmission of the Old Norse text the last, redemptive part of Ælfric's text was left out.
- 28 'Af slíku megum vér vita hvert megin þau hin heiðnu goð hofðu við Várn Dróttinn er alls er valdandi. Þat váru eigi goð; þat váru grimmir djöflar ok sálusvíkarar', *Hauksbók*, p. 161, and in the Old English source: 'Here we may know concerning the heathen gods, what power they had against the almighty God. They were not gods but cruel devils, deceivers of souls and the origins of sin'; 'Hér we magon tocnáwan be þam hæþenum godum, hwilce mihte hi hæfdon ongean þone ælmihtigan God. Hi ne synd na godas, ac synd gramlice deofla, sawla bepæcendras and synna ordfruman', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 692. This sentence refers back to the story about the abduction of the Ark of the Covenant and points ahead to the following stories from the Book of Daniel as well.
- 29 A handful of Old Norse compounds beginning with *lausungar-* 'false' can be found, e.g. *lausungarorð* 'false word, lie' but the inspiration for the term *lausungargoð* may well have been the Old English text that at this point refers

- to *leasum godum*: ‘we could say much about such false gods’; ‘Feala we mihton we secgan be swilcum leasum godum’, Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 703.
- 30 ‘En nú er þat langt ok leiðint at (segja) hversu illfúss þau váru ok hversu þau drógu fram sína embættismenn til hversvetna er illt var ok ómennska var í, til morðs ok til manndraps, til hórdóms ok til allskonar saurlífis’, *Hauksbók*, p. 164.
- 31 ‘Infandorum enim idolorum cultura omnis mala cause est et initium et finis’, Sap. 14:27, *Vulgata*.
- 32 Ælfric’s text is much shorter at this point: ‘We could say many things about such false gods, how ignominious they were and how they urged their worshippers to all abominations and to innumerable murders; and he was most precious to those gods who did the greatest crime’; ‘Feala we mihton secgan be swilcum leasum godum, hu bysmorfulle hi wæron and heora biggengon tihton to eallum fracodnyssum, and to endeleasum morðdædum; and se wæs þam godum dyrost þe dyde mæste fylðe’, Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 703.
- 33 Although this explanation for the creation of man is fairly standard, it is not given in any of the preserved versions of Ælfric’s Old English text. The fact that it is included in Martin of Braga’s *Pro castigatione rusticorum*, p. 76, one of Ælfric’s sources, shows that the relationship between the three texts may be more complicated than described above (cf. *Hauksbók*, pp. cxix–cxx). A comparable explanation can be found in *Gamalt norsk homiliebok*, p. 65, and in the widespread theological primer *Elucidarius*, p. 39, a text that had been translated into Old Norse in the twelfth century.
- 34 ‘Hinn flærðarfulli fjandi’, *Hauksbók*, p. 156.
- 35 Cf. the last sentence of the text: ‘Throughout these ages that have now been enumerated no one could come to heaven, until the holy Christ let himself be born into this world by the Holy Mary and freed all humankind from the torments of hell when he underwent torment and death on the holy cross’; ‘En um þessar aldir mátti engi maðr koma til himinríkis er nú eru taldar til þess er hinn helgi Krístr lét hingat berask af hinni helgu Maríu ok leysti allt mannkyn frá helvítis pínslum þá er hann tok pínsl ok dauða á hinum helga krossi’, *Hauksbók*, p. 156.
- 36 *Hauksbók*, p. 157.
- 37 On the theme of the seventy-two languages of the world, see Borst’s massive *Der Turmbau von Babel*.
- 38 Humankind ‘varð svikit af hinum sama djöfli er Adam sveik fyrr, svá at þeir gerðu sér goð’, *Hauksbók*, p. 157.
- 39 This rather commonplace explanation is followed by a more idiosyncratic statement: ‘but even if they wanted to think about it, they could not know that he was one God who created all that for the benefit of man’; ‘En þeir máttu eigi þat vita ef þeir vildi at því hyggja at sá er einn Guð er þat allt skóp monnum til hjalpar’, *Hauksbók*, p. 158. This statement is probably best explained by positing a scribal error at some point in the textual tradition. If the negation in this sentence is left out, one would have a positive statement along the following lines: ‘if they had wanted to think about it they would

have understood that he was one God who created all that for the benefit of man'. This would bring them in line with the cosmologers of Nachor's speech in *Barlaams saga* and the source in Ælfric's Old English *De falsis diis*: 'And they might have understood, if they had reason, that he is one God who, in his great goodness, created all these things for the benefit of us men'; 'Ac hi mihton tocnawan, gif hi cuðan þæt gescéad, þæt se is ána God þe hi ealle gesceop, us mannum to bryce, for his micclan gódnysse', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 681.

- 40 The -us ending of the name Venus occasionally led medieval scribes to the assumption that she was a god rather than a goddess; see Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 302–13. The R manuscript (CCCC 178) of Ælfric's *De falsis deis*, p. 686n., has 'vena', as does the first Norwegian hand of *Hauksbók* (realizing that she is a goddess and assuming, wrongly, that her name belongs to the first rather than the third declension).
- 41 'Hinn illi djöfull hafði svá svíkna þá hina heiðnu menn at þeir tóku illa karla ok argar konur ok blótuðu [sem] guð sín þá menn er þat eitt gerðu er fjanda vili var', *Hauksbók*, p. 159.
- 42 The basic principle of this model can be derived from a section of the *Elucidarius*, pp. 33–4, see also p. 61, in which the student asks why the fallen angels cannot rise to heaven again, while fallen humanity can. The master answers that the fall of man was instigated by the devil, while the angels chose evil of their own free will and without being impelled by an outside force.
- 43 'Svá var mannkynit svikit til þess er várr dróttinn gaf þeim enga gaum', *Hauksbók*, p. 159. Ælfric's text is milder at this point. Rather than having God ignore the heathens, he states that they 'became estranged from almighty God'; 'ælfremede wurdan fram þam ælmihtigan Gode', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 686.
- 44 On idol parodies in general, see Roth, 'For Life, He Appeals to Death'. See Wellendorf, 'The Æsir and their Idols', for a study of Old Norse instances of idol parody.
- 45 'Meðan þeir gerðu þá þótti þeim gaman eitt at. En þá er gert höfðu ok þeir goð kǫlluðu, þá stóð þeim agi af ok váru allir hræddir við þá', *Hauksbók*, p. 159.
- 46 The text of the manuscript appears to be corrupt at this point. I give my reconstruction of the text with manuscript readings in brackets where I have emended the text. This is followed by the Old English text and a translation of that text. Old Norse: 'Þar sá þeir djöflar [< diofla] er þá höfðu [< hafðu] áðr svíkna ok hin [< hini] fǫgru mannlíkun ok flugu þar í þeim, ok mæltu þaðan við þá hina ǫrmu menn ok villumenn ok lærðu þá til þess er þeir kómu sálum þeira ok sjálfum þeim í Helvíti', *Hauksbók*, p. 159. Old English: 'Then those devils, who had earlier deceived them, saw those beautiful idols and flew therein, and through the idols they spoke to the poor men and thus seduced them with their lies and brought their souls to hellish tortures'; 'Þa gesawon þa deoflu, þe hi beswicon on ær, þa fægran anlicnyss[a], and flugon þarto, and þurh þa anlicnyssa spræcon to þam earmum mannum, and hi swa forlæddon med heora leasungum, and to hellicum suslum heora sawla gebrohtan',

- Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 687. Despite Johnson's argument to the contrary in 'Euhemerisation versus Demonisation', the demonological interpretation of the origin of the cult of false gods is no less pronounced in Ælfric's *De falsis diis* than it is in Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*, the ultimate source for this section.
- 47 'Hinn helgi Krístr lét hingat berask af hinni helgu Maríu ok leysti alt mannkyn frá Helvítis pínslum þá er hann tók pínsl ok dauða á hinum helga krossi', *Hauksbók*, p. 164.
- 48 The name *Hauksbók* first appears in print in 1643 and has no medieval authority. According to Jón Helgason, 'Til Hauksbóks historie', p. 21, the name is first found in print in a work by Arngrímur Jónsson. Jón Helgason considers it probable that the name originated from Björn á Skarðsá, who copied sections of *Hauksbók* in the 1630s.
- 49 Toward the end of the *Hauksbók* text of *Landnámabók*, Haukr wrote (referring to *Landnámabók*): 'I, Haukr Erlendsson, wrote this book'; 'þessa bók ritaða [ek] Haukr Erlendsson', *Hauksbók*, p. 124; this part of *Hauksbók* is now lost, but it was still there when Jón Erlendsson copied the manuscript in the seventeenth century; the verb *ritaða* is in the first person while the pronoun 'ek' has been added at the suggestion of Árni Magnússon (see note ad loc.).
- 50 In the most detailed recent treatment of Haukr's life, Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité*, pp. 168–76, carefully reviews the progression of Haukr's career in Norway.
- 51 See the fairly detailed treatment by Perkins, *Flóamanna saga*, pp. 28–44.
- 52 *Hauksbók*, pp. 504–5. The now lost parts of *Hauksbók* were excerpted in the seventeenth century. The editors of *Hauksbók* printed the genealogy along with additional, now lost parts of *Hauksbók* from MSS AM 281 4to and AM 115 8vo on pp. 500–6. Haukr's wife Steinunn also receives an impressive genealogy. The couple have a common ancestor in the legendary Danish king Haraldr hilditǫnn.
- 53 Munch, 'Om ridderen og rigsraaden Hr. Hauk Erlendssøn', p. 301. A certain Óláfr Tottr has also been proposed as Haukr's paternal grandfather, see *Hauksbók*, p. ii.
- 54 Herra Erlendr Ólafsson sterki is often mentioned in *Árna saga biskups*.
- 55 Gottskálk's annals state s.a. 1307: 'Haukr lawspeaker, Snorri, and Guðmundr were all present at the assembly and each pronounced his own law on the payment of taxes'; 'Haukr legifer, Snorri ok Guðmundr þeir váru allir á þingi ok sagði sín lög hverr um skattgjöld', *Icelandic Annals*, p. 340 (the same information is given in the annals of Flatey, *ibid.*, p. 389). Skálholt's annals state s.a. 1331: 'Herra Haukr's arrival in Iceland with an order from the king concerning *kvennamál* and related matters'; 'Útkváma Herra Hauks með boðskap konungsins um kvennamál ok þat fleira sem þar fylgði', *ibid.*, p. 206. Fragmentary annals from Skálholt: 'Herra Haukr and Herra Ketill counted royal taxes throughout Iceland, and both went to Norway'; 'Herra Haukr ok Herra Ketill reiknuðu víseyrir um allt land ok fóru báðir til Nóregs', *ibid.*, p. 219.

- 56 So Finnur Jónsson in *Hauksbók*, pp. iii–iv, Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité*, pp. 173–4, and others.
- 57 Stefán Karlsson presented his theory in a rather brief but important article of 1964, ‘Aldur Hauksbókar’. It was republished in a volume of selected writing by him in 2000 (pp. 303–9); this version is used here.
- 58 The distinctive features Stefán Karlsson studied were the direction (left or right) of the flourishes at the end of the long descenders of the letters ‘f’, ‘p’, and ‘þ’ and the forms of the Tironian *et* (meaning *ok* ‘and’).
- 59 The order in which the stones are listed deviates from that of Marbod. An Icelandic manuscript dated 1387 (AM 194 8vo) contains a longer version of the same translation, edited in *AÍI*, pp. 77–83, and lists twelve stones in addition to the seven found in *Hauksbók*.
- 60 AM 371 4to contains *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga*, while the relevant parts of AM 544 4to contain *Trojumanna saga*, *Breta sögur* including *Merlínusþá*, *Hemings þátt*, *Hervarar saga*, *Föstbræðra saga*, *Algorismus*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Skálda saga*, *Af upplendinga konungum*, *Ragnarssona þátt*, and *Prognostica temporum*.
- 61 This also agrees with Jón Helgason’s observations in *Hauksbók: The Arnarnaganean Manuscripts*, p. xxi, that *Landnámabók* was written into *Hauksbók* after 1299 and *Föstbræðra saga* after 1304.
- 62 The folios contain a translation of the Pseudo-Senecan dialogue *De remediis* and a translation of Hugh of St. Victor’s *Soliloquium de artha animae*.
- 63 Ashman Rowe, ‘Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives’, pp. 71–4. Helgi Þorláksson’s paper was presented at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2004 and does not appear to have been published.
- 64 Ashman Rowe, ‘Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives’, p. 73.
- 65 Furthermore, there is no way of knowing exactly when Haukr added the third part of the manuscript. Stefán Karlsson’s formulation in ‘Aldur Hauksbókar’ is ‘um eða eftir 1310’. Ashman Rowe’s assertion in ‘Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives’, p. 73, that Haukr wrote it in 1311 is therefore only one possibility among others.
- 66 Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité*, p. 181. Ashman Rowe, who also quotes Gunnar Harðarson, rightly emphasizes the particular Icelandic outlook of *Hauksbók* at this point (‘Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives’, p. 73).
- 67 Stefán Karlsson therefore took care to point out that his argument concerning the development of the manuscript did not pertain to these eighteen folios.
- 68 That this part of *Hauksbók* is of Norwegian origin has often been observed in the literature on *Hauksbók*; see, e.g., Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnaganean Manuscripts*, pp. x–xi, who speaks about the first and second Norwegian hand, and Finnur Jónsson, who in *Hauksbók*, pp. xx–xxxvi, carefully analyzes the orthography under the heading ‘Norske stykker’. Another detailed analysis and discussion of the orthography of this part of the manuscript was carried out by Kristensen, *Nokkur blöð úr Hauksbók*. His claim that the first Norwegian scribe was Faroese rather than Norwegian has not been

accepted by subsequent scholarship, although it cannot be ruled out completely because of the dearth of written Faroese material from the Middle Ages (see Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, p. xi). For some reason, the Norwegian origin of this part of *Hauksbók* has not resonated among the majority of scholars writing on *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*, and it is generally held to be an Icelandic text (see n. 7). According to Hægstad, *Vestnorske maalføre fyre 1350* II, 2, part 2, p. 2, the hand of the first section reflects a dialect that is a transitional form between north-western and south-western Norwegian and the dialect of the scribe probably belonged to some place in Nordhordland, but he does not analyze the language of the first Norwegian scribe in any detail. Vondříčka, ‘Nokkur blöð úr *Hauksbók*’, discusses Kristensen’s Faroese hypothesis in some detail, but follows Hægstad in suggesting an origin in the northern part of Hordaland.

- 69 Witness the fourteenth-century Icelandic addition at the very bottom of the last verso side of the second Norwegian section (at fol. 18v lines 31–5). An Icelandic scribe has filled out an empty space by adding five lines that list ‘the twelve disgraces of the world’. This list is derived from *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*.
- 70 Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, p. vi.
- 71 Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, p. vi. That Haukr Erlendsson did not write the rubrics in the Norwegian parts indicates that Haukr was probably less closely involved in the making of these parts of the manuscripts – otherwise Haukr himself wrote all rubrics, see *Hauksbók*, pp. xv–xvi.
- 72 In its present state, the second Norwegian section contains the following texts: the conclusion of an abbreviated translation of *Disciplina clericalis*, a text linking the doctrine of the four humors with the four elements, and a translation of a version of the legend of the Crosstree. Although the scribe was clearly Norwegian, it is conceivable that he was copying from an Icelandic exemplar; see *Hauksbók*, p. xxxv. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, ‘Sagnastef í íslenskri menningarsögu’, p. 85, estimates that at least seven folios are missing.
- 73 For overviews of the contents of the entire manuscript, see, e.g., *Hauksbók*, pp. lxiii–cxxxvi, Jón Helgason *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, pp. xii–xviii, and Ashman Rowe, ‘Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives’, pp. 52–63.
- 74 Stecher, *Von den wunderlichen prunnen*, treats the medieval circulation of the lore connected with marvelous rivers and other bodies of water in monographic form.
- 75 Listed by Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, p. xix, n. 6, who claims (contra Kälund in *ÁÍ* I, p. xxv) that they cannot derive from *Hauksbók*.
- 76 According to Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagnæan Manuscripts*, p. xiii, it is ‘in all essentials an extract of [the above-mentioned sections of] Isidore[’s *Etymologiae*].’ Isidore was probably not the direct source, and his materials have been rearranged in *Hauksbók* and purged of all the etymologies that are

so characteristic of his work. Reference to Isidore's work will in many cases allow restoration of the (often garbled) names of rivers and lakes in the Old Norse texts on this material. Thus it is possible to determine with certainty that the river named 'Cog' in *Hauksbók*, p. 150, is to be identified with the river which Isidore calls 'Tagus', *Etymologies* 12.21.33.

- 77 *Hauksbók* is very worn at this point, and great portions of the text are illegible. However, the version of the text from AM 731 4to, printed in *Rymbegla*, pp. 350–5, strengthens the supposition that *Hauksbók* indeed begins with the rivers flowing from Paradise.
- 78 The rubric is found on the lower quarter of fol. iv and there is no reason to assume that the previous section on rivers and other bodies of water has been added to the manuscript later on. Judging from Jón Helgason's facsimile of *Hauksbók*, it is possible that the rubric was not written by the main scribe of this part of the manuscript and that it is a later addition, but neither Jón Helgason nor Finnur Jónsson mentions this possibility in their descriptions of the manuscript. The large decorated initial, a 'P', is the only such character in the first Norwegian section of *Hauksbók*.
- 79 That is, Moses, Dares Phrygius, Herodotus, and Pherecydes of Leros. Neither Herodotus nor Pherecydes was well known in the Norse world.
- 80 'A somewhat expanded rendering of Isidore I, chap. 42', so Jón Helgason, *Hauksbók: The Arnarnagæan Manuscripts*, p. xiii. In *Etymologies*, this section is labeled *De primis auctoribus historiarum* 'On the first writers of history'.
- 81 'Moses told that which occurred because of the greatest wonders [i.e. what happened during creation] and which the Holy Spirit taught him'; '[Moyses] sagði þat er mestum stórmerkjum sætir ok hinn helgi andi kenndi honum', *Hauksbók*, p. 152.
- 82 Edited in *ÁÍ* I, p. 6.
- 83 'Þessarar byggðar þá er Indíaland ýzt', *Hauksbók*, p. 153.
- 84 Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, p. 183, has suggested that this text was written by an Icelandic Benedictine who used a text Simek calls 'Kurze Weltbeschreibung' as his basis and supplied it with information from a number of other texts, *ibid.*, pp. 160–1. The 'Kurze Weltbeschreibung' is first attested in AM 736 I 4to (c. 1300–25). The other texts Simek claims were used by the author are, with the exception of a 'Wundervölkerverzeichnis nach AM 194 8vo' (this text has been edited under the title *Risapjóðir* in *ÁÍ* I, pp. 34–6), also found in *Hauksbók*. There is, however, no particular reason to associate it with Iceland, and neither is it particularly obvious that it should be a Benedictine product.
- 85 Bartholomew, Thomas, Paul, Peter, John, Phillip, and Andrew.
- 86 Four sons of Shem, son of Noah: Asshur, Elam, Arphaxad, and Aram. Two sons of Japheth: Magog (written Magon) and Tiras. One son of Ham: Mizraim.
- 87 Such as Nimrod's construction of the Tower of Babel, the giving of the Law to Moses, Jerusalem where Christ suffered, and Bethlehem where he was born.
- 88 There is no obvious explanation for the exclusion of Africa from the overview of the geography of the world.

- 89 'Pat er ok margra manna mál – at því er fornar bœkr vísa til – at af því landi byggðisk Svíþjóð, en Nóregr af Svíþjóð, en Ísland af Nóregi, en Grœnland af Íslandi', *Hauksbók*, p. 155.
- 90 *Hauksbók*, p. 157.
- 91 A close parallel to this section is found in *Rymbegla*, pp. 340–2, edited from AM 731 4to, and a related text is found in AM 194 4to, edited in *ÁÍ* I, pp. 7–8. Younger parallels are listed and discussed by Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, pp. 222–8 and 457. Ashman Rowe, 'Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives', p. 54, lists Isidore's *Etymologies* (9.2) as a source, but the similarity is only superficial.
- 92 This section incorporates material from Isidore's *Etymologies* (11.3.12–27) but adds peoples not mentioned by Isidore and presents the material in a different order. The text *Risapjóðir* found in AM 194 8vo, edited in *ÁÍ* I, pp. 34–6, clearly builds on the same material, but it presents the material in an order similar to that found in Isidore. Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, p. 223, has argued that this text and the previous one did not originally belong together, but there is a clear logic to this sequence. If they have been deliberately juxtaposed in *Hauksbók*, it only strengthens the assumption that the texts in the first Norwegian section have been purposely selected and ordered with an eye to creating a sequence that outlines the early history and the geography of the world and its inhabitants.
- 93 A part of the rubric is illegible.
- 94 See Reichborn-Kjennerud, 'Et kapitel av Hauksbók'.
- 95 'í helgu fjalli Oliveti', *Hauksbók*, p. 171.
- 96 Holtsmark, 'En gammel norsk homilie', pp. 270–2, discusses the origin of the sermon and, although she does not present strong arguments in favor of a Norwegian origin, concludes that it is by no means certain than it is Icelandic, as scholars before her assumed.
- 97 See the discussion by Cucina, 'The Rainbow Allegory'. The oldest text is that of AM 673a 11 4to, *ibid.*, pp. 69–73.
- 98 *ÁÍ* II, pp. 48–50.
- 99 A parallel text was edited in *ÁÍ* II, pp. 50–1.
- 100 A parallel text in AM 194 8vo, edited under the title *Landafræði* in *ÁÍ* I, pp. 23–5, goes on to describe Jerusalem as well.
- 101 He gives his own name as *o ixzs. qscrqs. osnr. rom.* Kålund explains the ciphers in *ÁÍ* I, p. 54, nn. 11–15, and decodes the text as 'Óláfr prestr Ormsson'.
- 102 The texts of AM 194 8vo are substantially different from those of *Hauksbók*. The case for AM 731 4to's independence of *Hauksbók* is made by Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Rímbeqlusmiður', pp. 311–12. Kålund, who edited parts of AM 731 4to in *ÁÍ* III, pp. 1–24, held that a significant part of its materials is derived from *Hauksbók*.
- 103 It is uncertain whether the organization of materials in AM 731 4to reflects medieval practices. Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Rímbeqlusmiður', has argued that Björn Jónsson, when writing AM 731 4to, used a single late fourteenth-century manuscript, but it is also possible that Björn combined materials

from various sources. On AM 731 4to, see also Kålund's partial edition in *Alf* III, pp. 1–24 and introduction, and *Veraldar saga*, pp. xxxi–xxxii. For an edition of the encyclopedic materials of AM 731 4to in its entirety, see Björnssen's *Rymbegla*, pp. 315–424. According to Jakob Benediktsson in *Veraldar saga*, p. xxxii, Björnssen based his edition on AM 730 4to, a copy of a copy of AM 731 4to.

- 104 *Alf* I, p. 3. The first quire contains materials predominantly computistic in nature and is left out of consideration in the present context. Kålund did not include the text of this quire in his edition of AM 194 8vo in *Alf* I (see pp. xviii–xix and 3, n. 1).
- 105 The *Hauksbók* assemblage is not conceived as world history in its traditional medieval sense (such as the Icelandic *Veraldar saga*); e.g., it does not begin with the creation of the world, and although the ages of the world are mentioned, they are not used as a structuring principle.
- 106 The *Hauksbók* version of *Trójumanna saga* even contains a mythological introduction that is not found in other versions of that saga.
- 107 Just as the text treated in the [previous chapter](#) used the ethnonyms Chaldeans, Greeks, and Egyptians as shorthand for the different kinds of disbelief, namely cosmolaters, idolaters, and zoolaters.
- 108 While Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, p. 682, situates Saturn in Crete, the Old Norse version says only that Saturn lived 'on some island'; 'í ey nǫkkori', *Hauksbók*, p. 158.
- 109 Although not stated outright, it is also implied that Mars is called Týr: 'Sá Jupiter var þeirra allra ríkastr hinna heiðnu manna er sumir kalla Þór ... var einn maðr sá er Mercurius hét ... en hann hét Óðinn á dǫnsku ... týsdag gáfu þeir Marti ... Hinn .vi. dag gáfu þeir hinni ǫrgu Venu er heitir Frigg á dǫnsku'; 'That Jupiter, whom some call Þór, was the most powerful of all those heathen people ... there was a man who was called Mercurius ... but he was called Óðinn in Danish ... they gave Tuesday to Mars ... The sixth day they gave to the lecherous Vena who is called Frigg in Danish', *Hauksbók*, pp. 158–9.
- 110 'A certain man was called Mercurius in life, who was very deceitful and treacherous in deeds, and also loved theft and deception. The heathens made him a great god and offered gifts to him at crossroads and brought him sacrifices on high mountains. This god was revered among all pagans, and he is called Óðon by another name in Danish. Now the Danes say in their error that he is Iouis whom they call Þór, the son of Mercurius whom they call Óðon; but they are wrong, for we read in heathen as well as Christian books, that the evil Iouis in truth was the son of Saturn, and the books which the old heathens thus wrote about him cannot be invalidated; and also in the passions of martyrs we find such [claims] written'; 'Sum man wæs gehaten Mercurius on life, se wæs swiðe facenfull and swicol on dædum, and lufode eac stala and leasbregdnysa. Þone macodan þa hæþenan him to mæren gode, and æt wega gelætum him lac offrodan, and to heagum *beorgum him brohtan onsæg[ed]nysse. Ðes god wæs [a]rwyrðe betwyx eallum hæþenum,

and he is Óðon gehátan oðrum naman on Denisc. Nu secgað þa Deniscan on heora gedwylde þæt se Iouis wære, þe hi Þór hátað, Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon hátað; ac hi nabbað na riht, for þam þe we rædað on bocum, ge on hæþenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis to soðan wære Saturnes sunu, and þa béc ne magon beon awægede þe þa ealdan hæðenan be him awriton þuss; and eac on martira þrowungum we gemetað swa awriten', Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, pp. 684–5.

- 111 Of articles dedicated to this phenomenon in a Norse context, one can mention Tveitane, 'Interpretatio norroena', and Battista, 'Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon'. In the context of classical antiquity, I found Wissowa, 'Interpretatio Romana', Timpe, 'Tacitus' *Germania*', pp. 448–55, Assmann, 'Translating Gods', Lund, 'Zur *Interpretatio Romana*', pp. 295–308, and Rives, 'Roman Translation', particularly illuminating.
- 112 A theme issue of the journal *Mediterraneo antico: Economie, Società, Culture* (15 (1–2), 2012) is entitled *Interpretatio Romana/Graeca/Indigena: Religiose Kommunikation zwischen Globalisierung und Partikularisierung*.
- 113 Saxo, treated in the following chapter, is an exception. He argues against the identificatory position and states that 'we must realize that Thor and Jupiter, Odin and Mercury are different personages' (trans. Fisher, p. 381), 'restat ut ... Thor alium quam Iouem, Othinum quoque Mercurio sentiamus exitisse diuersum', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 6.5.4. The argument he uses is similar to the Ælfric's argument (cited in n. 110). The two groups of deities are thus seen as similar rather than identical. Nevertheless, he applies *interpretatio romana* in the poetry included in *Gesta danorum* without commenting upon it (see Chapter 4).
- 114 See *Hauksbók*, pp. 195–7.
- 115 'var þar í líkneski Gefjunar ok Saturnus ok Jupiters ... þá gerðu þeir elda þrjá, einn fyrir Óðni, annan fyrir Þór, þriðja fyrir Gefjun', *Hauksbók*, p. 241. The Latin text mentions Jupiter, Mercury, and Diana at this point.
- 116 The order of the three names has changed from the first half of the quotation to the second. It is therefore uncertain whether the scribe held that Óðinn was seen as the equivalent of Saturn or of Jupiter. Þórr's Latin name is likewise uncertain. Elsewhere in *Hauksbók*, Saturn is identified with Freyr, p. 193, while Þórr is identified with Jupiter in a number of instances, e.g. on pp. 158 and 195 (Kítar-Þórr 'Þórr of Crete'). Judging from Battista's survey in 'Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon', it is reasonable to assume that Óðinn is Saturn and Þórr is Jupiter.
- 117 Assmann, 'Translating Gods'; Smith, *God in Translation*.
- 118 'apud Nahanarvalos antiquae religionis lucus ostenditur. praesidet sacerdos muliebri ornatu, sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant. ea vis numini, nomen Alcis. nulla simulacra, nullum peregrinae superstitionis vestigium; ut fratres tamen, ut iuvenes venerantur', Tacitus, *Germania* 43.3. The translation cited comes from Rives, *Germania*, p. 94, but has been slightly modified by the present author.
- 119 See the discussion in Ando, 'Interpretatio Romana'.

- 120 According to Herodotus, the Skythians, e.g., called Zeus Papaïos, Apollo Goitosyros, Aphrodite Argimpasa, etc. (4.59), while the Egyptians called Zeus Amon (2.42), Apollo Horos (2.144), etc. Harrison, *Divinity and History*, pp. 158–81, discusses Herodotus' use of *interpretatio*.
- 121 It is also conceivable that Tacitus, who by the year 88 had become a member of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, see Rives, *Germania*, p. 42, a priesthood which among other things oversaw the cult of foreign deities at Rome, had had special occasion to contemplate the practice that we now know as *interpretatio*.
- 122 'Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem ac Martem concessis animalibus placant. pars Sueborum et Isidi sacrificat: unde causa et origo peregrino sacro parum comperi nisi quod signum ipsum in modum liburnae figuratum docet advectam religionem', Tacitus, *Germania* 9.1.
- 123 Although it has been argued by Timpe, 'Tacitus' *Germania*', pp. 465–7, that Tacitus is mistaken at this point and that the use of the name Isis is in fact an *interpretatio romana*.
- 124 'Deum maxime Mercurium colunt ... post hunc Apollinem et Martem, et Iovem, et Minervam. de his eandem fere quam reliquae gentes habent opinionem', Caesar, *Bellum gallicum* 6.17.1–2.
- 125 'Germani multum ab hac consuetudine differunt. nam neque druides habent, qui rebus divinis praesint, neque sacrificiis student. deorum numero eos solos ducunt, quos cernunt et quorum aperte opibus iuvantur, Solem et Vulcanum et Lunam. reliquos ne fama quidem acceperunt', Caesar, *Bellum gallicum* 6.21.1–2.
- 126 A study of this phenomenon concludes: 'In worshipping indigenous deities the desire [of the members of the Roman army] was not so much to Romanize as to secure divine support', Saddington, 'Roman Soldiers', p. 169.
- 127 Monuments dedicated to deities with such double names can be found throughout of the Roman Empire, but the examples given in the following are from its north-western part.
- 128 For example, *CIL* XIII, 6604, an inscription, dated to 191, from a temple dedicated to Mercury in Miltenberg in the Roman province of Germania superior. The inscription says: 'In honor of the imperial family, for the Cimbrian Mercury, Mansuetinius Se[---], centurion of the first cohort of the Sequani and the Raurici, placed the statuette of Mercury in the consulate of Apronianus and Bradua'; 'In h(onorem) [d(omus) d(ivinae)] Mercur(io) Cim[briano] Mansuetinius Se ... (centurio) coh(ortis) primae) Seq(uanorum) et R[auric(orum)] sigil(lum) Mercur(ii) [posuit] Apronian(o) et Bra[dua co(n)s(ulibus)]'. See Spickermann, *Germania Superior*, pp. 201–2, and Gutenbrunner, *Die germanischen Götternamen*, pp. 52–4.
- 129 'Consecrated to Mars Halamardus. Titus Domitius Vindex, centurion of the legio XX Valeria Victrix willingly and deservedly discharged his vow'; 'Marti Halamard[o] sacrv[m] T(itus) Domit(ius) vindex (centurio) leg(ionis) XX V(aleriae) V(icticris) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)', *CIL* XIII, 8707.

The interpretation of *Halamardus* is disputed. Gutenbrunner, *Die germanischen Götternamen*, pp. 50–1, rejected the traditional interpretation ‘der Mannmörder’, while Wagner, ‘Chali und Chalitani’, pp. 63–5, followed by Neumann, ‘Germani cisrhenani’, p. 222, defended it. Spickermann, *Germania Superior*, p. 53, considers it likely that it is an erroneous form of an original Germanic name (‘wahrscheinlich handelt es sich um die falsche Schreibweise eines ursprünglich germanisches Namens’). This inscription from Horn bei Roermond in Germania Inferior is dated 10–43? CE (Spickermann, *Germania Superior*, p. 52).

- 130 ‘To the god Mars Thincsus and the two Alaisiagae, Beda and Fimmilena, and the divinity of Augustus Germanus, the Cives Tuihanti willingly and deservedly discharged their vow’; ‘Deo Marti Thincso et duabus Alaisiagis Bede et Fimmilene et N(umini) Aug(usti) Germ(ani) ciues Tuihanti u(otum) s(oluerunt) l(ibentes) m(erito)’, *RIB* 1593. The inscription is found on a sandstone pillar from the Roman fort of Housesteads (Vercovicium) at Hadrian’s Wall. It is of uncertain date (from between 43 and 410 CE). See Gutenbrunner, *Die germanischen Götternamen*, pp. 24–52, and Birley, ‘The Deities of Roman Britain’, p. 77.
- 131 See Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices*, pp. 73–130, for an informative survey, discussion, and analysis of parts of this material.
- 132 Romanization did not only affect the names by which deities were venerated. The entire practice of erecting monuments with votive inscriptions is likely to have been adopted by speakers of Germanic languages from the Roman tradition. The cult, as far as one can tell, thus has a Roman form.
- 133 See e.g. De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. II, pp. 11–13 and p. 30, and Battista, ‘Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon’, p. 176.
- 134 One example from York mentioning Mercury simply reads: ‘To the god Mercury’; ‘Deo Mer(curio)’, *RIB* 655. Another example, this one from Risingham, Northumberland, reads: ‘To Mars Victor, Julius Publius Pius, tribune, willingly and deservedly discharged his vow’; ‘Marti Victori [I]ul(ius) Pub(lius) [P]ius Trib(unus) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)’, *RIB* 1221. In these cases, the underlying local deities are unlikely to have been Germanic deities.
- 135 Trans. from Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, p. 32. ‘Age et his uocabulis esse deos facimus quibus a nobis nominantur? at primum quot hominum linguae, tot nomina deorum; non enim ut tu, Velleius, quocumque ueneris, sic idem in Italia Volcanus, idem in Africa, idem in Hispania’, Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.84.
- 136 A comparable view (but with a henotheistic bent) is presented by Plutarch in his treatise on Isis and Osiris (377f): ‘nor do we regard the gods as different among different peoples nor as barbarian and Greek and as southern and northern. But just as the sun, moon, heaven, earth and sea are common to all, though they are given various names by the varying peoples, so it is with the one reason which orders these things’; οὐχ ἑτέρους παρ’ ἑτέροις οὐδὲ βαρβάρους καὶ Ἑλλήνας οὐδὲ νοτίους καὶ βορείους; ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἥλιος καὶ

σελήνη καὶ οὐρανὸς καὶ γῆ καὶ θάλασσα κοινὰ πᾶσιν, ὀνομάζεται δ' ἄλλως ὑπ' ἄλλων, οὕτως ἑνὸς λόγου τοῦ ταῦτα κοσμοῦντος', text and trans. from Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, pp. 222–5.

- 137 Greek and Latin literature provides a number of examples of precautionary measures taken by those who offer prayers to the gods. In Aeschylus' tragedy *Agamemnon*, e.g., the choir begins a prayer to Zeus with the words: 'Zeus: whatever he may be, if this name pleases him in invocation, thus I call upon him', trans. from Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, trans. Lattimore, lines 160–2; 'Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ' ἔστιν, εἰ τόδ' αὐτῶι φίλον κεκλημένωι, τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω', Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 2011, lines 160–2.
- 138 Battista, 'Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon'.
- 139 Battista, 'Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon', pp. 193–4.
- 140 The Romans traditionally used an eight-day week in which only the eighth day, the *nundinum*, had its own name. The seven-day week, in which each day was named after a Roman god (and a celestial object), was only adopted in the time of Augustus. The details of the system (if any) that was abolished with the introduction of the seven-day week among Germanic-speaking peoples are unknown, but there is evidence to suggest that at least some speakers of Germanic languages counted nights rather than days (cf. Tacitus *Germania* 11.1; Green, *Language and History*, p. 236) and that a five-day (or five-night) week was current in the North; cf. ON *fimmt* which among other thing can refer to an interval of five days.
- 141 Green, *Language and History*, p. 246; Shaw, 'The Origins of the Theophoric Week'.
- 142 It is unknown when the seven-day week and its naming scheme were adopted in Scandinavia. The issue is most recently discussed by Sonne, 'The Origin of the Seven-Day Week in Scandinavia', who invalidates an old argument against a post-conversion adoption of the week in Scandinavia. However, he refrains from arguing the case for a post-conversion adoption, contending that the burden of proof lies with those who argue for an early adoption of the seven-day week in Scandinavia (*ibid.*, p. 188).
- 143 Strangely, the text skips the fifth day of the week, the day devoted to Jupiter/Þórr. Ælfric's Old English text mentions that the fifth day of the week is devoted to Jupiter but does not add the corresponding English god, Þunor (ON Þórr).
- 144 In their etymological dictionary, Bjorvand and Lindemann, *Våre arveord*, p. 569, remark: 'Navnet ... på denne ukedag er særnordisk og skyldes tydeligvis den skikken at man brukte lørdagen til å ta et bad.'
- 145 'Er [sá dagr] kallaðr laugardagr er á qðrum lqndum heitir Saturnusdagr', *Áldsta delen af Cod. 1812*, p. 40.
- 146 Saturn would much later be identified with Njǫrðr (see Chapter 5). In Old English, e.g., the common name for Saturday was, as already mentioned, *Sætern[es]dag*, while the Old High German name was *Sambaztag*, from Latin *Sambatium dies* 'Sabbath day' (Shaw, 'The Origins of the Theophoric Week', p. 388).

- 147 Thus one can read in the encyclopedic computistic text *Rím I* that ‘Hesperis [the evening star] is called Venus. We call it Freyja. The fasting day [i.e. Friday] is named after this star and called *frjádagr*’; ‘Hesperis heitir Venus, þat kǫllum vér Freyju, þar er fǫstudagr við kendr ok kallaðr frjádagr [frea daghr], *ÁÍ* II, p. 63. For this passage, the editors drew on a rather late Icelandic manuscript, but the same information must once have been contained in the much older GkS 1812 4to, from c. 1192. The manuscript is fragmentary at this point, but with an eye to the sentence just quoted, it can without great difficulty be reconstructed as follows (the bracketed words have been supplied by the present author): ‘Hesperis [heitir] Ve[nus, þat] kǫllu[m] vér Frey[ju, þar er] fǫstudagr við kendr [ok] kallaðr freadagr [i.e. frjádagr]’, *Áldsta delen af Cod. 1812*, p. 39. A text from AM 736 II 4to explains that ‘Fasting day [Friday] is named Friday after Freyja’; ‘fǫstudagr heitir frjádagr af Freyju’, *ÁÍ* III, p. 69.
- 148 *Breta sögur*, in *Hauksbók*, p. 269. Plausible etymologies for ON *frjádagr* are that it has been borrowed from OE *frigedæg*, ‘Frig’s day’, see Shaw, ‘The Origins of the Theophoric Week’, p. 399, or from OHG *frīatag* (De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* II, p. 303). *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* might therefore be correct, historically speaking, when it attributes this day to Frigg rather than Freyja. Furthermore, the relationship between the two goddesses is complex, and a quite convincing case can be made for a common origin of the two; see Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, p. 129. Heizmann, ‘Freya’, pp. 291–2, briefly lists the commonalities of the two goddesses.
- 149 Although Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, does have an entry for *freigjädagr*, it is probably a corrupted form. The single attestation ‘Fræighiadaghen’ (acc. def.) is found in a fifteenth-century document (*DN* IX, 311.3). In Modern Faroese, however, the day is indeed called ‘Fríggjädag’. De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* II, pp. 303–4, claims that the choice of the name *Frjádagr* (rather than **Fríggjardagr*) shows that the name was adopted at a point in time when Frigg was not commonly known in Scandinavia.
- 150 One would also have to explain the loss of -n- before the second element of the compound.
- 151 *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, pp. 85 and 133, and *Alvissmál* st. 16, in *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 440. Incidentally, Old Norse *sól* and *sunna* both appear to derive from the same (heteroclitic) Proto-Indo-European root (**séh₂u-el* with gen. **sh₂-én-s/* **sh₂u-n-ós*, Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, pp. 463–4. It should be noted though that Proto-Indo-European l/n-stems are very rare; see Wachter, ‘Das indogermanische Wort für “Sonne”’ and Ringe, *From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic*, p. 277). This has resulted in two different sun words in the Germanic dialects: a less commonly attested one derived from the nominative root (Gothic *sauil* n. and Old English *sōl* n.) and a more frequently attested form derived from the oblique form (Gothic *sunno* n./f. and Old English *sunne* f./*sunna* m.). The more frequent form is also reflected in Modern English *sun* and German *Sonne* f., while the

Modern Scandinavian languages all have forms derived from the nominative form (e.g., Norw. *sól* f., Icel. *sól* f.).

- 152 Lucian, e.g., writes about the Syrian goddess who was worshipped in Hierapolis: ‘in general she is undoubtedly Hera ... but she has something also of Athena, Aphrodite, Selene, Rhea, Artemis, Nemesis and the Fates’ (cited from Rives, *Religions in the Roman Empire*, p. 143).

4 The Byzantine Gods of Saxo Grammaticus

- 1 Friis-Jensen has proposed 1208 as a plausible *terminus ante quem* for the composition of Saxo’s work in ‘When Did Saxo Finish His *Gesta Danorum*?’.
- 2 Schier, ‘Gab es eine eigenständige Balder-Tradition in Dänmark?’, has made a case for an independent East Scandinavian Baldr tradition. The classic study on Saxo’s use of East and West Scandinavian sources is Olrik, *Forsøg på en tvedeling af kilderne*.
- 3 Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction*, p. 174. Clunies Ross, ‘Mythic Narrative in Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturluson’, pp. 48–9, cites a number of examples of this attitude, but does not mention Dumézil’s monograph *From Myth to Fiction*, which argues that Saxo transposed a number of myths to the realm of history (p. xi *et pass.*). See also Mundal, ‘Kva funksjon’, pp. 237–8.
- 4 Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction*, p. 190, argues that Saxo’s version of the Baldr story ‘does not in fact overlay some authentic variant of the Baldr myth, all [differences] derive from the fact that for some unknown reason Saxo decided to give Höðr-Høtherus the sympathetic and heroic role and to that end transferred all the characteristics and qualities of Baldr to him.’ In one of the appendices to his monograph, p. 201, Dumézil argues that Saxo’s changes to a particular myth ‘are of the same type and magnitude as those that Saxo saw fit to make in other myths, and like them are no more than a writer’s literary whims.’
- 5 Friis-Jensen, ‘Saxo og det 12. århundredes renæssance’, p. 98, makes a similar observation: ‘Visse sider af det nordiske hedenskab har Saxo simpelthen fortiet. Saxo har kun spredte bemærkninger om den kultiske side af gudevæsenet ... Kun de mere ufarlige vendiske helligdomme får den store opmærksomhed.’
- 6 ‘Nec mirandum, si prodigialibus eorum portentis adducta barbaries in adulterine religionis cultum concesserit, cum Latinorum quoque prudentiam perlexerit talium quorundam diuinis honoribus celebrata mortalitas’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.5.6.
- 7 ‘As Gormo had been convinced by the plausible arguments of some, that souls were immortal, he began to inquire into which habitation he would make for when the spirit had left the body, and which reward his eager veneration of the gods would earn him’; ‘[Gormo] cum probabilibus quorundam argumentis animas immortales esse compertum haberet, quasnam sedes esset exuto membris spiritu petiturus, aut quid premii propensa numinum ueneratio mereretur, cogitatione secum uaria disquirebat’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 8.15.1.

- 8 The *editio princeps* consistently gives the form ‘Vgarthilocus’ and this form is retained in the most recent edition. The name has conventionally been restored to ‘Utgarthilocus’ to correspond with ON Útgarða-Loki. The restored form is also used by Fisher in the translation that accompanies the most recent edition.
- 9 ‘At long last Thorkillus landed in Germania, that at that point had been admitted into the Christian faith, and by its people he learned the rudiments of the worship of God’; ‘Tandem ad Germaniam Christianis tunc sacris initiatam appulsus [Thorkillus] apud eius populum diuini cultus rudimenta percepit’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 8.15.10.
- 10 One sees this clearly when one compares *Heimskringla*’s account of the emergence of the cult of the Norse gods in *Ynglinga saga* with the sections dealing with the efforts to introduce Christianity to Norway by Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. See also Wellendorf, ‘The Æsir and Their Idols’.
- 11 Saxo’s treatment of the material concerning the fourth-century Ostrogothic king Ermanaric (ON Jǫrmunrekkr), whom he turns into a Danish king Iarmericus in 8.10.1–14, shows how far he was willing to go in order to enlarge the history of the Danes by appropriating extraneous materials.
- 12 Olrik, *Forsøg på en tvedeling af kilderne* II, pp. 36–46, discusses the abundant Danish place-name lore associated with the Baldr story.
- 13 ‘We call them gods by belief rather than by nature; for we grant the name of divinity to such not in accordance with their nature, but with the custom of the people’; ‘Deos autem potius opinatiue quam naturaliter dicimus. Talibus nanque non natura, sed gentium more diuinitatis uocabulum damus’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.2.10.
- 14 ‘To wit, deficient divinity often has need of human assistance’; ‘Plerunque enim humane opis indiga est imperfecta diuinitas’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.4.1. Said about Óðinn (Othinus) as he seeks advice from a Finnish sorcerer by the name of Rostiophus.
- 15 ‘It would be hard to believe that the gods were overcome by humans if the ancients did not testify to this’; ‘Inimicum opinioni esset, nisi fidem antiquitas faceret, deos ab hominibus superari’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.2.10.
- 16 Some examples drawn from Indo-European traditions are given by West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, pp. 150–1, but they can easily be supplemented by Semitic examples. Louden, *Homer’s Odyssey and the Near East*, pp. 16–29, studies this theme in relations to apocalypics.
- 17 See Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte*, pp. 94–5, Skovgaard-Petersen, ‘The Way to Byzantium’, and Chekalov, ‘The Seat of the Eddaic Gods in Byzantium’, for explanations as to why Saxo placed the main seat of the Scandinavian gods in Byzantium. To my knowledge, the only other text to connect the Norse gods explicitly with Byzantium/Constantinople is a reference in *Morkinskinna* to the Hippodrome (ON *paðreimr*) of that city, which is said to have been artfully decorated with images and statues depicting characters from myth and legend: ‘The walls [of the hippodrome] are decorated with many old stories,

Æsir, Völsungar and Gjukungar fashioned out of copper and iron with such great skills that they appear to be alive'; 'Eru þar skrifuð margs konar forn tíðendi, Æsir ok Völsungar ok Gjukungar, gort af kopar ok málmi með svá miklum hagleik at þat þykkir kvikt vera', *Morkinskinna* vol. II, p. 97. Obviously, this instance of the phenomenon of *interpretatio* (see Chapter 3) concerns depictions of the gods, rather than the gods themselves.

- 18 *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk* and Nachor's speech, the texts discussed in the previous chapters, focus on the origin of disbelief, and does not explain how it came to pass that the ancient Scandinavians came to venerate their gods.
- 19 Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, pp. 211–34, in her thorough discussion of Saxo's treatment of Óðinn also bases her discussion on a two-storied model, but one of a different nature. I am not aware of any extended studies on the matter of the gods of the second order in the Old Norse context, but touch briefly on the matter in Wellendorf, 'The Æsir and Their Idols'.
- 20 Because Saxo's work plays out in the historical mode where one anticipates referentiality, inconsistencies are harder to swallow than in the mythic *Gylfaginning*, where complementarity is acceptable. As this expectation is not fulfilled, scholars have occasionally claimed that Saxo did not understand the material that he transmitted. Thus Olrik, *Forsøg på en tvedeling af kilderne* I, p. 37, states on one occasion that Saxo simply misunderstood his informants: 'Han har næppe fået ret fat ved sin hjemmelsmands ord.' Similarly Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte*, p. 92, claims that 'Saxo hilft sich ... mit Überkommenem zurecht, mit unvollständigem und zum Teil unverstandenen Materiale.'
- 21 'ne, cum prestigia portentaue perscripsero, lectoris incredula refragetur opinion', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.5.6.
- 22 *Mathematicus* is one of Saxo's terms for sorcerer. He uses this term only once, *magus* being a more commonly used word for wizard in his work. Saxo normally refers to gods using the Latin *deus* 'god' or the nominalized *superi* 'those above'.
- 23 Lindow, 'Some Thoughts on Saxo's Euhemerism', has studied how Saxo's model maps onto the vernacular mythological material.
- 24 There are, however, a few characters that are the offspring of unions of a member of the second category and an ordinary human. The most obvious example is Bous, son of Óðinn and the Russian princess Rinda (3.4.1–8; 13–15). Baldr's status is more difficult to determine. He is said to be Óðinn's son (*Othini filius*, 3.2.3), and Nanna rejects his courtship with a brief lecture in which her main point is that they are incompatible because he is an immortal god while she is a mere mortal (3.2.9). However, in addition to this Baldr is also characterized as a 'half-god ... brought into existence by the enigmatic seed of the gods'; 'semideum ... arcano superum semine procreatum', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.2.4 This naturally implies that his mother was not a god, but Saxo does not have anything further to add on the topic of Baldr's mother.
- 25 On this theme, see Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, pp. 103–43.

- 26 ‘Acres animis, robusti iuuenta, prestabiles habitu corporis, giganteis clari triumphis, tropheis gentium celebres, spoliis locupletes’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 6.2.3.
- 27 ‘There are those who say that the gods, which our people venerated, only shared the names with those whom Greece or Rome venerated, but that they [the Scandinavian gods], as if they were almost equal [to the classical gods] in greatness, lent the cult, along with the name from them’; ‘Sunt qui dicant deos, quos nostri coluere, cum iis, quos Grecia uel Latium celebrabat, solum participasse uocabulum, sed istos tanquam maiestate suppres ab illis cultum cum nomine mutuatos fuisse’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 6.5.5. This sentence is often understood in a somewhat different way, so I give Fisher’s English translation as well: ‘Some say that the ones adored by our nation only shared the title of gods with those Greece or Italy used to honour, and that the former borrowed both the name and their rites, being nearly comparable with them in dignity’, from Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* vol. 1, p. 381.
- 28 In the prose sections, Latinized Norse names are normally used. Roman names of deities, those of Venus and Mars in particular, crop up in a number of instances, but they are typically used to designate ‘love’ and ‘war’, rather than ‘the god of love’ and ‘the god of war’, as it is customary in Latin. An example including both Venus and Mars can be found in the introduction to Saxo’s *Exhortationum series*: ‘Hialto rated valor higher than extravagance and would rather seek out the calamitous predicament of Mars [war] than indulge in the sweet allurements of Venus [love]’; ‘Hic [Hialto] ... fortitudinem luxurie pretulit maluitque funestum Martis discrimen appetere quam blandis Veneris illecebris indulgere’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 2.7.3.
- 29 Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as a Latin Poet*.
- 30 *Exhortationum series* is Saxo’s Latin recomposition of the (fragmentarily preserved) Old Norse poem *Bjarkamál*, also known as *Húskarlahvot*.
- 31 ‘uota sequamur per summum iurata Iouem superosque potentes’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 2.7.7.
- 32 An Old Norse oath that calls the gods to witness is presented in the *Hauksbók* version of *Landnámabók*: ‘I call that to witness, that I swear on the ring a legally binding oath; so help me Freyr and Njǫrðr and the almighty áss’; ‘Nefni ek í þat vætti ... at ek vinn eið at baugi, lǫgeið; hjálp mér svá Freyr ok Njǫrðr ok hinn almáttki áss’, *Landnámabók*, p. 315. On the identity of the ‘almighty áss’, see Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, pp. 55–6.
- 33 ‘Non humile obscurumue genus, non funera plebis Pluto rapit uilesque animas, sed fata potentum implicat et claris complet Phlegethonta figuris’, Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 2.7.21.
- 34 ‘Óðinn owns the earls who fall in battle, but Þórr has the race of thralls’; ‘Óðinn á jarla | þá er í val falla, | en Þórr á þræla kyn’, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 393. There is general agreement among scholars that Hárbarðr is Óðinn in disguise.
- 35 A similar circumlocution is found in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’s seventh occasional stanza: ‘I hate [or place hatred on] the old husband of Frigg’; ‘legg ek á frumver Friggjar | hjón’, *Skj* BI, p. 158.

- 36 'At nunc ille ubi sit, qui uulgo dicitur Othin armipotens ... si uis presentem tuto cognoscere Martem ... Si potero horrendum Frigge spectare maritum ...', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 2.7.25–7.
- 37 The general parallelism established between Mars and Óðinn in this passage justifies reading Virgil as a subtext for Saxo and partly invalidates Friis-Jensen's argument in *Saxo og Vergil*, pp. 46–7, that the adjective *armipotens* is quite common and that its Virgilian usage cannot be taken to be Saxo's model.
- 38 *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 12. See Schröder, 'Odins Verbannung', for a brief but wide-ranging study of Óðinn's exiles.
- 39 'At that time, a certain Othinus, although he was falsely held in divine reputation throughout Europe, stayed mostly at Uppsala either because of the ignorance of the inhabitants or because he held the charm of the region worthy of this remarkable practice'; 'Ea tempestate cum Othinus quidam Europa tota falso diuinitatis titulo censeretur, apud Vpsalam tamen crebriorem diuersandi usum habebat eamque siue ob incolarum inertiam siue locorum amoenitatem singulari quadam habitationis consuetudine dignabatur', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.7.1.
- 40 Shaw, 'Miracle as Magic', p. 200, in a discussion of this passage, argues that Saxo's wording 'indicates the exercise of mechanical craftsmanship rather than wizardry', but given the fact that Saxo persistently lets Óðinn be characterized through his sorcery, Saxo's ambiguous reference to Óðinn's craft is here taken to refer to magical abilities.
- 41 See Wellendorf, 'The Æsir and Their Idols', for a fuller treatment of this theme in relation to idols of Norse gods drawing on West Norse sources.
- 42 'Indigna foemina, que numinis coniugio potiretur! Hoc loci quid aliud adiecerim quam tale numen hac coniuge dignum extitisse?', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.7.1.
- 43 This theme is explored in more detail by Ambrosiani, *Odinskultens härkomst*, p. 18, who sees the two accounts discussed in this section in a very different light.
- 44 Othinus' wife Frigga may be an exception, but it is unclear whether she is a member of the council and she never betrays any wizard-like qualities.
- 45 The etymology of this name (given as Mithotyn in the *editio princeps*) is unclear, but it may be taken to mean 'middle Óðinn' (i.e. 'Mið-Óðinn'). There is no known equivalent of Mithothyn in the vernacular Norse sources.
- 46 'He denied that the wrath of the gods or profanation of the divinities be atoned for with jumbled and disorganized sacrifices, forbade that votive offerings were made to them collectively, and instituted separate offerings for each god'; 'Hic deorum iram aut numinum uiolationem confusis permixtisque sacrificiis expiari negabat ideoque eis uota communiter nuncupari prohibebat, discreta superiorum cuique libamenta constituens', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.7.2.
- 47 The possible significance of Mithothyn's reform has been studied by Zavaroni, 'Communitarian Regime and Individual Power', 'Communitary and Individualistic Gods'.
- 48 References to the Fates can be found at e.g. 1.4.12; 5.3.22; 6.6.11; and 7.9.11; references to 'those above' at 1.8.2; 6.9.1; and 8.14.20.

- 49 'Fata sectatus superumque mentem Sueonum pressit decus impotentum, dum neci regem dedit et rigenti contudit auro', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.4.12.
- 50 A number of Old Norse gods are in diverse sources said to be able to control the wind: Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 18, and *Hyndluljóð* st. 3, *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 460; Njörðr in *Gylfaginning*, p. 23; and Þórr by Adam of Bremen, p. 258, and a number of other sources (see Perkins, *Thor the Wind-Raiser*).
- 51 'Inauditi generis beluam ... unum e superis alieno corpore tectum', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.8.11.
- 52 'Religionem animo intulit atque ad uota superis nuncupanda confugit, extreme necessitatis presidium in deorum ope consistere iudicans. Denique aliis varias deorum potentias exorantibus ac diuerse numinum maiestati rem diuinam fieri oportere censentibus ipse Vgarthilocom uotis pariter ac propitiamentis aggressus prosperam exoptati syderis temperiem assecutus est', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 8.14.20.
- 53 One example can be found in the saga of the apostle Bartholomew, *Barthólómeus saga*, where it is used to explain away the apparent beneficence of Astarod's idol in India, in *Isländska handskriften N° 645, 4°*, pp. 99–100. See also Wellendorf, 'The Æsir and Their Idols', where this passage is cited and briefly discussed.
- 54 See Herrmann, *Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern*, p. 103.
- 55 'credo diis infernalibus ita destinantibus, ut in ea loca uiuus adduceretur, que morienti petenda fuerant', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 1.8.14.
- 56 In the following quotations, the words that resemble Saxo's verdict on the reason for Hadingus' otherworld journey have been underlined. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta* 1.5.1: After Rome had been destroyed by the Gauls, the Roman senators debate whether they should all migrate to Veii or rebuild Rome. An omen convinces them to stay and Valerius exclaims: 'credo indignum dis existimantibus prosperrimis auspiciis Romanum nomen ortum Veientanae urbis appellatione mutari'; 'I believe that the gods did not think it right that the name of Rome, that had originated with the most lucky auspices, should be replaced by that of the Veientane city.' Justinus, *Epitoma* 11.15.1–2: 'Interea Darius in gratiam victoris a cognatis suis aureis conpedibus catenisque in vico Parthorum Thara vincitur, credo ita diis immortalibus iudicantibus, ut in terra eorum, qui successuri imperio erant, Persarum regnum finiretur'; 'In the meantime, Darius in order to please the victor [i.e. Alexander], was bound by his relatives with golden fetters and chains in Thara, a village among the Parthians. I think the immortal gods thus had decided that the rule of the Persians should come to an end in the land of those whose reign was to come.'

5 Gods and Humans in the *Prose Edda*

- 1 Both works are customarily attributed to Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241), but his authorship has occasionally been questioned. It seems to me that the attribution of the *Prose Edda* as we know it to Snorri Sturluson is particularly problematic.

Even if one accepts that Snorri did in fact play a crucial role in the fashioning of the *Prose Edda*, as is explicitly stated in the rubric to the Uppsala manuscript of the text ('This book is called Edda. It has been assembled by Snorri Sturluson in the manner in which it is arranged'; 'Bók þessi heitir Edda, hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson eptir þeim hætti sem hér er skipat', *Uppsala Edda*, p. 6), the divergent forms in which the *Prose Edda* is preserved make it impossible to determine what the text of Snorri's *Edda* actually was. The discussion about which of the two main versions (represented by the manuscripts U on the one hand and RTW on the other) is the most original has been reignited in recent years. Sävborg's novel argument for the primacy of RTW over U, in 'Blockbildningen i Codex Upsaliensis', represents a significant departure from earlier studies (see n. 89 for shelfmarks and dates). But even if Sävborg's arguments are accepted, Snorri Sturluson's contribution to RTW is impossible to gauge with exactitude. As Faulkes writes in the introduction to his edition of *Prologus* and *Gylfaginning*, p. xxx: 'On the whole it seems best to admit that the manuscripts preserve various compilations based on the lost work of Snorri Sturluson, each of which has its own interest and value'. As the authorship of the *Prose Edda* is of minor consequence for the arguments in the following, it has seemed best to remain agnostic on this point.

- 2 Euhemerism is named after Euhemeros, who around 300 BCE wrote an account of an imaginary journey on the Indian Ocean. During his travels he came to the island of Panchaea where, on a golden monument, one could read that Uranus, Kronos, and Zeus had been great kings who were worshipped as gods after their death. Euhemeros's original novel is lost, but quotations are preserved by other writers, most importantly Diodorus Siculus (d. c. 27 BCE), and in a Latin translation by Ennius (d. 169 BCE) which is lost as well but is quoted by later authorities. On Euhemeros and his work, see Winiarczyk, *The Sacred History of Euhemerus of Messene*.
- 3 A basic form of euhemerism is found already in the genealogies that have been appended to Ari fróði's pioneering *Íslendingabók* from the early twelfth century. In the last of these genealogies Ari's own forefathers are traced back to Freyr, Njörðr Sviakonungr 'king of the Swedes', and Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr 'king of the Turks', Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, p. 27. Freyr and Njörðr are both considered gods in Scandinavian tradition, while the status of Yngvi is more uncertain.
- 4 'Der ... zugrundeliegende Analogie-Gedanke adelte ... die heimische Überlieferung', Beck, 'Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie', p. 19.
- 5 Beck, 'Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie', p. 2.
- 6 Dronke and Dronke, 'The Prologue of the *Prose Edda*', and Faulkes, 'Pagan Sympathy'.
- 7 van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*. Marold, 'Der Dialog in Snorris *Edda*', on the other hand, is somewhat skeptical of Beck's work on the *Prose Edda*.
- 8 van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, p. 202. Cf. Beck, who had already in 'Die *Snorra-Edda* in heutiger Sicht', p. 36, of 1993 observed in the *Prose Edda* an attitude 'die in einem Analogie-Denken die heidnische Vorzeit positiv zu werten versucht'.

- 9 van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, pp. 84–9. A recent English-language article by van Nahl, ‘The Skilled Narrator’, is presented as an attempt to broadcast current German scholarship on *Gylfaginning* – mainly his own and Beck’s – that, according to van Nahl, has faced a ‘somewhat unsatisfying lack of a scholarly debate’, p. 136.
- 10 Beck, ‘Die *Uppsala-Edda*’.
- 11 ‘inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda’, *Concilium Lateranense*, p. 166. Beck writes in ‘Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie’, p. 2: ‘In der theologischen Debatte fand die Analogie eine gültige Definition auf dem 4. Lateran Konzil (von 1215), da im Fall der Gott-Mensch-Beziehung zwar die “so große Ähnlichkeit zwischen Schöpfer und Geschöpf” feststellte, zugleich aber ergänzte, dass eine “je immer größere Unähnlichkeit in der noch so großen Ähnlichkeit” verbleibe.’
- 12 Beck, ‘Die *Uppsala-Edda*’, p. 22; see also van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, pp. 59–60. See Waßenhoven, *Skandinavien unterwegs in Europa*, p. 143, n. 4, for a list of named Scandinavians who are known or assumed to have participated in the Fourth Lateran Council.
- 13 See Klingenberg, ‘*Gylfaginning*’, for an elaborate discussion of this aspect of *Gylfaginning*.
- 14 The phrase ‘Óðinn theology’ is particularly associated with Baetke’s fundamental study ‘Die Götterlehre der *Snorra Edda*’, first published in 1950.
- 15 *Gylfaginning*, pp. 8–9.
- 16 On the relationship between the description of Alfqðr and the Christian creed, see Marold, ‘Der Dialog in Snorris *Edda*’, pp. 142–6.
- 17 Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 24.
- 18 Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, pp. 17 and 22.
- 19 ‘[Óðinn] var den mest direkte motsetning av Gud, selve *andskotinn*’, Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 26.
- 20 ‘[D]ie anschließende Bemerkung [... wirkt ...] wie eine pflichtschuldigst nachgeschobene Unähnlichkeitsbestätigung’, Beck, ‘Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie’, p. 17. See also Beck, ‘Die *Uppsala-Edda*’, p. 18, where he argues in a somewhat different vein that Alfqðr’s presence among frost-giants is a necessity for his killing them. This in turn is a precondition of the creation of the world.
- 21 The discussion in the following is based on what can be called the standard version of *Prologus* and *Gylfaginning*, as it is represented in Faulkes’s edition, but *Uppsala Edda* is also taken into consideration where appropriate. A discussion of W is found in the concluding section of this chapter.
- 22 Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, and Weber, ‘*Edda*, Jüngere’, pp. 398–402. Baetke, on the other hand, argues that the author of *Gylfaginning* was inspired by the demonological teachings but that he altered the demonology by shifting the responsibility for the delusions from demons to the earthly Æsir: ‘Wie er [Snorri] stets den kirchlichen Doktrinen gegenüber eine gewisse Zurückhaltung bewahrte und dem Übernatürlichen nur begrenzten Spielraum gewährte, so hat er die Dämonen aus dem Spiel gelassen und die Täuschung Gylfis den Asen selbst übertragen’, Baetke, ‘Die Götterlehre der *Snorra-Edda*’, p. 228.

- 23 Writing about the peace and prosperity (*ár ok friðr*) brought about by the earthly Æsir, Weber writes, ‘*Edda*, Jüngere’, p. 398: ‘Die “wirkliche” – dämonologische – Erklärung dieser Prosperität der Æsir, die der Christ als Wirken der seit dem Engelssturz die Welt bewölkenden Dämonen (“Teufel”) begreift, die unbemerkt den Götterkult usurpieren und die Opferer (*blótmenn*) belohnen, bleibt Gylfi sowohl wie auch den Æsir unbekannt.’ See also Weber, ‘*Siðaskipti*’, pp. 317–18.
- 24 Weber, ‘*Edda*, Jüngere’, p. 399.
- 25 See von See, *Mythos und Theologie*, pp. 81–3. Later illustrations modeled on the drawing in *Codex Upsaliensis* transform the floating head into a sun, see Grape *et al.*, *Snorre Sturlassons Edda* vol. 1, pp. 29–30.
- 26 ‘Ordene *fiðlkunnigr* og *fiðlkyngi* blir en slags nøkkelord når vi skal finne ut av Snorres innstilling til det mytologiske stoffet’, Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 12.
- 27 Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, pp. 12–15. See also the discussion of van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, pp. 173–9, who argues that *fiðlkyngi* in the Snorronic writings is understood as a skill or proficiency in something (‘*Fertigkeit*’, p. 177).
- 28 It is only a variant reading in MS W that applies the term *fiðlkyngi* to the Æsir, *Prose Edda* W, p. 79 app. The passage in W reads: ‘But the Æsir knew about his journey in advance, and he was received well, although many things were done with magic’; ‘En æsir vissu fyrir ferð hans [sc. Ægir’s] ok var honum fagnat vel ok þó margar hlutir gervir með *fiðlkyngi*’, *Prose Edda* W, p. 50.
- 29 *Gylfaginning*, pp. 7 (Gylfi), 36 (Ívaldi’s sons), and 43 (Útgardaloki); *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, pp. 1 (Ægir), 45 (Hreiðmarr), and 72 (Hildir).
- 30 This at least is how the title *Gylfaginning* is commonly understood. See McTurk, ‘*Fooling Gylfi*’, pp. 3–11, for an argument to the effect that the title is intentionally ambiguous and should also be understood as ‘the fooling [of the Æsir] by Gylfi’. Incidentally, the only medieval authority for the title *Gylfaginning* is the rubric to the text U: ‘Here begins the fooling of Gylfi [telling] about how Gylfi visited Alföðr in Ásgarðr with magic and about the falsehood of the Æsir and about the questioning of Gylfi’; ‘Hér hefr Gylfa ginning frá því er Gylfi sótti heim Alföðr í Ásgarð með *fiðlkyngi* ok frá villu ása ok frá spurningu Gylfa’, *Uppsala Edda*, p. 10.
- 31 Of the eleven attestations of *ginning* ‘fooling’ gathered by ONP (online), discounting the one that gave rise to *Gylfaginning*, only one is associated with sorcery.
- 32 *Den store Saga om Olav den Hellige*, p. 750, singularly uses the word *sjónhverfing* to designate a phenomenon of apparent divine origin.
- 33 In both instances the illusions are described as *sjónhverfingar* (*Gylfaginning*, pp. 7 and 42).
- 34 Most recently van Nahl, *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie*, pp. 77–81. For ‘*Pórsginning*’, see Lorenz, *Snorri Sturluson*, p. 539.
- 35 Þórr: ‘And when Þórr heard this speech, he grabbed for the hammer and raised it into the air. But as he is about to thrust it forward, he does not see

Útgardaloki anywhere. And then he turns back toward the castle intending to destroy the castle. Then he sees wide pleasant fields but no castle. Then he turns around again and journeyed until he came back to Þrúðvangar'; 'En er Þórr heyrði þessa tölgu greip hann til hamarsins ok bregðr á lopt, en er hann skal fram reiða þá sér hann þar hvergi Útgardaloka. Ok þá snýsk hann aptr til borgarinnar ok ætlask þá fyrir at brjóta borgina. Þá sér hann þar völlu víða ok fagra en önga borg. Snýsk hann þá aptr ok ferr leið sína til þess er hann kom aptr í Þrúðvanga', *Gylfaginning*, p. 43. Gylfi: 'Next Gangleri [i.e. the disguised Gylfi] heard great noises on all sides and looked to the side. And as he looks around more carefully, he stands out on a level field, sees no hall and no castle. He walked away and came home in his kingdom'; 'Því næst heyrði Gangleri dyni mikla hvern veg frá sér, ok leit út á hlið sér. Ok þá er hann sés sk meir um þá stendr hann úti á sléttum velli, sér þá önga höll ok önga borg. Gengr hann þá leið sína braut ok kemr heim í ríki sitt', *Gylfaginning*, p. 54.

- 36 'Hic acceptis Hotherus labentis hospitii tegmine defectus sub dio se relictum totiusque expertem umbraculi mediis repente campis expositum conspicatur. Precipue uero puellarum prepetem fugam locique uersilem situm ac fallacem edis imaginem mirabatur. Ignorabat enim, que circa se gesta fuerant, ludibrium tantum inaneque prestigiosarum artium exitisse commentum. Vnde rediens Geuaro ordinem insecute errorem suum ludificationis exponit', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.2.4–5.
- 37 In 'Þórsginning', the recounting is only implied. It is possible, but by no means certain, that the curious remark that introduces the story of Þórr's visit to Útgardaloki is a refence to Þórr: 'Then Jafnhár says: "We have heard events told that we find hard to believe are true, but he will sit nearby who will be able to recount a true tale and you should believe that he will not lie now for the first time, who has never lied before"'; 'Þá mælir Jafnhár: "Heyrt höfum vér sagt frá þeim atburðum er oss þykkja ótrúligir at sannir muni vera, en hér mun sjá sitja nær er vita mun sönns tíðindi af at segja, ok muntu því trúa at hann mun eigi ljúga nú it fyrsta sinn er aldri laug fyrr"', *Gylfaginning*, p. 36.
- 38 The Latin translation of *Gylfaginning* that accompanies the text in *Prose Edda* 1848–87 vol. 1, p. 30, therefore chose well, and may even have had Saxo's account in mind, when the title *Gylfaginning* was translated as *Ludificatio Gylviana*, 'The Gylfian Fooling'.
- 39 'Ginningen er en hedensk åpenbaring, en åpenbaring av *fiolkyngi*', Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 12.
- 40 'Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda', *Concilium Lateranense*, p. 166.
- 41 Beck, 'Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie', p. 10.
- 42 'til þess at þá er langar stundir liði at menn skyldu ekki ifask í at allir væri einir, þeir Æsir er nú var frá sagt ok þessir er þá váru þau sömu nöfn gefin', *Gylfaginning*, p. 55.
- 43 'Ego et Pater unum sumus', John 10:30, *Vulgata*.
- 44 'Eine Identitätserklärung dieser Art ist in der Religionsgeschichte so selten (ja einmalig?), dass schon deswegen die Relation zwischen Neuem Testament und Gylfaginning eine fast zwingende Annahme ist. Natürlich gibt es Beispiele von

Vergöttlichung, aber dies im Sinne eines Identitätsanspruches zu erheben, scheint doch eher die Ausnahme zu sein', Beck, 'Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie', p. 12.

- 45 In Old Norse literature, he plays an important role already in the early thirteenth-century *Clemens saga*.
- 46 'Þessi sami Simon var ... svá höfuðœrr, at hann trúði sik guð vera eða þorði qðrum kosti sik guð at kalla með falsi ok lygi, heitandi þeim er á hann trýði, at þeir mundi eilífir verða', *Postola sögur*, p. 49, see also pp. 51–2, 78, 87–8 and elsewhere. Similarly, one reads in *Clemens saga*, p. 14, that Simon Magus 'claimed to be the power of God' and 'said that he was the sun itself'; 'vera lézk [hann] kraptr Guðs. Hann talðisk vera sólin ipsa' and later that his followers 'believed that he in truth was God'; 'þeir trúðu hann at sönnu goð vera', *Clemens saga*, p. 26. When read in the context of the sagas, it is clear that ON *goð* should be translated 'God' rather than 'a god'.
- 47 Khosroe 'þóttisk goð vera', *Gamla norsk homiliebok*, p. 135. Another example of humans claiming identity with the divinity is the prophet Mani, founder of Manichaeism, who is said to have claimed identity with the Paraclete, i.e. the Holy Spirit (see e.g. van Oort, 'The Paraclete Mani').
- 48 This is most clearly formulated in the RWT tradition, where the migrating Asians are said to have 'falsified' stories about the events in Troy so that people should consider them gods: 'hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fólsum fráfrásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúá þá guð vera', *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, p. 5, cf. *Prose Edda* 1931, p. 86. This sentence is not found in U.
- 49 'gerðu þeir í miðjum heimi Ásgarð. Þar byggði Óðinn ok ættir þeira er várar ættir eru frá komnar [< komnir]', *Uppsala Edda*, p. 20.
- 50 'Þat hugsuðu þeir ok undruðusk hverju þat mundi gegna at jorðin ok dýrin ok fuglarnir höfðu saman eðli í sumum hlutum ok þó var ólíkt at hætti', *Prologus*, p. 3. Beck attaches particular importance to the text of the Uppsala manuscript, which reads: 'They were amazed that the earth and animals had a shared nature in some respects considering how different they were'; 'Þat undruðusk þeir er jorðin ok dýr höfðu saman náttúru í sumum hlutum, svá ólíkt sem þat var', *Uppsala Edda*, p. 6.
- 51 Beck, 'Die Uppsala-Edda', p. 23.
- 52 'dýr ok fuglar', *Prologus*, p. 3.
- 53 'Af þessu skilðu þeir svá at jorðin væri kyk ok hefði líf með nokkurum hætti', *Prologus*, p. 3. The U text is almost verbatim identical.
- 54 The grammatical gender of the Old Norse noun *jorð*, 'earth', is feminine.
- 55 'Terram matrem', Tacitus, *Germania* 40.2. On the name Nerthus, which is only one variant among many, see Lund, 'Zur Interpretatio Romana', p. 306, and Battaglia, 'Nerthus as a Female Deity', pp. 3–4 *et pass.*
- 56 Þórr is said to be the son of Earth in kennings such as *jarðar sonr* 'son of Earth', *jarðar burr* 'offspring of Earth', and *grundar sveinn* 'boy of the ground', see Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, p. 253. In *Gylfaginning*, Hár explains that 'the earth was also his [Allfather's] daughter and wife. And by her he got his first son, and that is Ásaþórr'; 'Jorðin var dóttir hans ok kona hans. Af henni gerði hann hinn fyrsta soninn, en þat er Ásaþórr', *Gylfaginning*, p. 13.

- Later in *Gylfaginning*, Hár states that Jörð and Rindr are reckoned among the Ásynjur, p. 30, implying that they do not truly belong to that category. In Saxo's demythologizing narrative Rinda (corresponding to the Old Norse Rindr) is introduced as a daughter of the Russian king ('Rinda, Ruthenorum regis filia', Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta danorum* 3.4.1, which shows her status as an other (= non-Ásynja) at the mythological level).
- 57 See the impressive set presented by Faulkes, 'Pagan Sympathy', pp. 7–12.
 - 58 This name, and related names, are most recently treated by Strandberg, who in 'On the Etymology of Compounded Old Icelandic Óðinn Names', pp. 106–7, suggests that Alfǫðr should be taken to mean 'having a forefather who is (grown) big'. Whatever the merit of this interpretation, the *Prose Edda* clearly interprets the name as 'father of all': 'And he can be called All-Father because he is the father of all the gods and men and everything which was brought into being through him and his power'; 'ok fyrir því má hann heita Alfǫðr at hann er faðir allra goðanna ok manna ok alls þess er af honum ok hans krapti var fullgert', *Gylfaginning*, p. 13.
 - 59 An even clearer parallel would have been 'Father Sky', a name that has been reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European mythology (see Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European*, pp. 408–9).
 - 60 'Lífir hann [Alfǫðr] of allar aldir ok stjórnað öllum ríki sínu ok ræðr öllum hlutum stórum ok smám', *Gylfaginning*, p. 8.
 - 61 See Faulkes, 'Pagan Sympathy', pp. 12–15, and Dronke and Dronke, 'The Prologue of the *Prose Edda*', pp. 158–62, for brief surveys.
 - 62 De Cruz and de Smedt, *A Natural History of Natural Theology*, pp. 61–84, treat the argument from design in more general philosophical and cognitive terms. They conclude their discussion of the argument from design by stating, p. 84, that the human propensity to discern purpose in nature is highly intuitive, but that it can be strengthened and weakened through instruction.
 - 63 Faulkes, 'Pagan Sympathy'.
 - 64 'He [God] also shared out wisdom so that they understood all earthly things and all particulars of the air and the earth which they could observe'; 'Miðlaði hann ok spekina svá at þeir skilðu alla jarðliga hluti ok allar greinir þær er þeir sjá mátti loptsins ok jarðarinnar', *Prologus*, p. 3, and 'but they understood everything with an earthly understanding because they had not been granted the spiritual wisdom'; 'En alla hluti skilðu þeir jarðligri skilningu þvíat þeim var eigi gefin andlig spekðin', *Prologus*, p. 4.
 - 65 For a careful analysis of the epilogue to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, see O'Connor, 'History or Fiction', pp. 141–56.
 - 66 'Þat er ok sannliga ritat, at guð hefir lánat heiðnum mönnum einn veg sem kristnum vit ok skilning um jarðliga hluti, þar með frábæriligan fröeknleik, auðæfi ok ágæta skapan', *FAS* vol. III, p. 280.
 - 67 'Hefir þessi atrúnaðr á marga lund breyzk svá sem þjóðarnar skiptusk ok tungurnar greindusk', *Prologus*, p. 4.
 - 68 So, e.g., Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 57.
 - 69 Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, p. 57.
 - 70 This etymology, which is derived from Isidore's *Etymologies* VIII.9.69, relies on the near homonymy between the name Juno, Jano, and Lat. *janua* 'door,

entrance'. Isidore's discussion of Isis is found in later in the same book (VIII.9.84).

- 71 'Hans systir Ysis fór á skipi til Egiptalands. Hon var svá klók kona, at hon kenndi egipzkm mǫnnum nǫkkura þá bókstafi ok ritsháttu sem þeir kunnu eigi áðr. Af sáðplóg ok korngerð frœddi hon þá, hvar fyrir þeir kǫlluðu hana Ysidem, þat sem upp á þeira tungu þýðisk jorð, þar sem hon hét áðr Juno, svá sem Jano, því at philosophi sǫgðu at hon væri svá sem hurð eðr port allra þeira kvenna sem giptisk ok barnbærar væri. Nú af fyrirsagðri sǫk var hon eptir sinn dauða í guðatölu tekin á Egiptalandi', *Stjórn*, p. 164. *Stjórn* cites *Historia scholastica* by Peter Comestor as its source, but the passage also appears to draw upon Isidore's *Etymologiae*, *Stjórn* 2009 vol. 1, p. 248.
- 72 'Nær þessum tíma varð stórliga mikit flóð í þeiri Girklands hálfu er Achaia heitir á dögum þess konungs sem Ogyges hét ... Þá sýndisk sú mæð við vatnið Triconidem sem Girkir kalla Minervam. Hana segja þeir fundit hafa margskonar listir ok mikilsháttar mannvit ok einkanliga allar þær sem af ullu verða gervar. Isidorus. Trichom hét eit mikit stöðuvatn í Africa hjá hverju er segisk hon sýndisk á jungfrú aldri, ok fyrir þá sǫk heitir hon ǫðru nafni Trichonia. Hvaðan af er hon var af heiðnum mǫnnum í guðatölu hǫfð heimoliga sem hennar ætt ok afspringi [var.lec. uppruni] var til ǫllum ókunnigri. En fyrir þann skyld at þeir trúðu út af henni mǫnnum veitask skynsemd ok íþrótaskilning þá sǫgðu þeir hana af hǫfði sjálfs Jovis foedda vera', *Stjórn*, pp. 174–5.
- 73 'Quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur, et pro uniuscuiusque vita vel meritis coli apud suos post mortem coeperunt', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.II.1.
- 74 See Hobson, 'Euhemerism and the Veiling of History', who stresses the importance of poets.
- 75 'In quorum etiam laudibus accesserunt et poetae, et conpositis carminibus in caelum eos sustulerunt', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.II.2.
- 76 'Gentiles autem primum Prometheum simulacrum hominum de luto finxisse perhibent, ab eoque natam esse artem simulacra et statuas fingendi. Unde et poetae ab eo homines primum factos esse confingunt figurate propter effigies', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.II.8.
- 77 'Officium autem poetae in eo est ut ea, quae vere gesta sunt, in alias species obliquisfigurationibus cum decore aliquo conversa transducant', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.7.10.
- 78 'vanae fabulae' and 'fabulosa figmenta', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.II.29 and 89.
- 79 'Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fǫlsuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúá þá guð vera', *Prologus*, p. 5.
- 80 Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*.
- 81 See Johansson, *Studier i Codex Wormianus*, for a study of W. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 41–72, discusses the *Prose Edda* in the context of *grammatica*.
- 82 The textual problems connected with establishing the standard version of the prologue are significant and have been discussed by Faulkes, who, drawing on medieval as well as postmedieval manuscripts, also attempts to reconstruct a text, see 'The Prologue to *Snorra Edda*'. The text of *Prologus* in the Uppsala manuscript is discussed by Beck, 'Die Uppsala-Edda'.

- 83 These sections are, according to Johansson, *Studier i Codex Wormianus*, p. 36, the following passages in *Prose Edda* W: pp. 2.27–3.33, 4.18–6.38, and 8.27–8.30.
- 84 The editions of Faulkes (*Prologus*) and Finnur Jónsson (*Prose Edda* 1931). The additional sections are included in some older editions such as the old Arnarnagðæan edition, *Prose Edda* 1848–87 vol. 1, pp. 2–30, although the editors of this edition take care to point out that W is mistaken in having these sections, vol. 1, p. 7, n. 12.
- 85 Boer, ‘Studier over *Snorra Edda*’, pp. 185–90, who regarded the prologue in W as the one closest to the archetype, is an exception, but his view does not seem to have found many supporters.
- 86 These studies include Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte*, Dronke and Dronke, ‘The Prologue of the *Prose Edda*’, Faulkes, ‘Pagan Sympathy’, Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál*, Klingenberg, ‘Odin und die Seinen’, and von See, ‘Der Prolog der *Snorra Edda*’.
- 87 Sigurður Nordal, *Codex Wormianus*, p. 15.
- 88 Males, ‘Wormianusredaktören’. Johansson, *Studier i Codex Wormianus*, p. 39, states ‘interpolationerna [förstärker] den argumentation som redan finns i den ursprungliga prologen’. Similarly Strerath-Bolz, *Kontinuität statt Konfrontation*, pp. 78–9, writes ‘Die Einschübe stellen eine Erweiterung dar, die von den Schwerpunkten des Haupttextes ablenkt, liegen aber insofern völlig auf der Linie des Haupttextes, als sie dessen gelehrtes Interesse nur nochmals betonen, seinen Tenor indes nicht antasten.’
- 89 R: GkS 2367 4to (c. 1300–50); T: Utrecht 1374 (c. 1600); U: Uppsala, DG 11 (c. 1300–25). See *Prose Edda* 1931, pp. iii–xiii.
- 90 ‘Many ages later, when Pompey, a chieftain of the Romans, harried the East, Óðinn fled Asia hither to the North’; ‘Morgum öldum síðarr þá er Pompeius, einn höfðingi Rómverja, herjaði í austrhálfunna, flýði útan Óðinn ór Asia ok hingat í norðrhálfunna’, *Prose Edda* W, p. 6. *Heimskringla*’s version of the migration myth does not mention Pompey in particular, but it more than implies that Óðinn was forced to flee his ancestral lands before ‘the chieftains of the Romans’, *Rómverjahöfðingjar*, *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 14.
- 91 This is the name most commonly used for the figure Zarathustra in medieval Western Europe. In W, his name is given as Zoroastres.
- 92 ‘En til þess at heldr mætti frá segja eða í minni festa, þá gáfu þeir nōfn með sjálfum sér ok hefir þessi átrúnaðr á marga lund breyzk, svá sem þjóðirnar skiptusk ok tungurnar greindusk, *Prose Edda* W, p. 2. A part of these lines was quoted above (in n. 67) from the standard version of *Prologus*.
- 93 See Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, and, more recently and briefly, Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, pp. 1–59.
- 94 ‘And they said: “Come let us build a town for ourselves and a tower whose top may reach heaven and let us glorify our name before we are separated across the earth”’; ‘et dixerunt venite faciamus nobis civitatem et turrem cuius culmen pertingat ad caelum et celebremus nomen nostrum antequam dividamur in universas terras’, Gen. 11:4, *Vulgata*.
- 95 van der Toorn and van der Horst, ‘Nimrod before and after the Bible’.

- 96 One example can be found in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae*; see Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, p. 442, and van der Toorn and van der Horst, 'Nimrod before and after the Bible', pp. 27–8.
- 97 Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, pp. 439–502.
- 98 Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, p. 783.
- 99 'In his old age, Noah divides the world between his sons. He destined Ham the western part, Japhet the northern, and Sem the southern'; 'Í elli sinni skiptir Núi heiminum með sonum sínum. Ætlaði hann Kam vestrhálfu, en Jafet norðrhálfu, en Sem suðrhálfu', *Prose Edda* W, p. 2. By *vestrhálfu* 'the western part', the author must be referring to Africa (as the quotation in n. 101 makes clear).
- 100 'They found a field in the land of Shinar'; 'Invenerunt campum in terra Sennaar', Gen. 11:2, *Vulgata*.
- 101 'In those days, greed and ambition increased immediately because many arts were discovered which had not been known earlier. And each advanced himself in accordance with his skill, and their pride grew to the point where those Africans who had descended from Ham, harried the part of the world in which their relatives, the descendants of Sem, lived'; 'Í þann tíma ofgaðisk þegar ágirni til fjár ok mannmetnaðar af því at þá kenndusk þær margar listir sem áðr höfðu ekki fundnar verit. Ok hóf sik hverr eptir sinni íþrótt ok svá langt færðu þeir framm sinn metnað at þeir africani, komnir af Kam, herjuðu í þann hluta veraldar sem byggði afspringr Sems frænda þeira', *Prose Edda* W, p. 2.
- 102 *Stjórn*, pp. 64–5. Otherwise, *Stjórn* attributes the discovery of many of the arts to Cain and his close relatives and immediate descendants and stresses that many of them were beneficial to the 'sons of light', *Stjórn*, pp. 44–6.
- 103 *Prose Edda* W, p. 3.
- 104 'En sem nōfnin fjolguðusk, þá týndisk með því sannleikrinn', *Prose Edda* W, p. 3.
- 105 The text does not convey much additional information on the character of Zoroaster, but it does mention his ominous laughter at birth, a theme also found in *Stjórn*, where it is derived, via Vincent of Beauvais, from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* 21.14 and Solinus' *De mirabilibus mundi* 1.6. *Stjórn* explains: 'People say that Zoroaster alone laughed at the time of his birth. And this portentous and terrible laughter did not augur any good, since he was nevertheless defeated in battle and overcome by Ninus the king of the Assyrians'; 'Menn segja at einn saman Zoroastes hafi þat gert at hlæja á sínum burðartíma. Ok eigi bendi sá inn skýrsiligi ok inn hræðiligi hlátr nōkkut gott fyrir, þvíat allt at eins varð hann af Nino Serkjakonungi sigraðr í bardaga ok yfirstiginn', *Stjórn*, p. 101.
- 106 See, for example, Jerome's commentary on Isaiah: 'Bel, whom the Greeks call Bel and the Latins Saturn'; 'Bel: quem Graeci Belum, Latini Saturnum vocant', *PL* 24, col. 450.
- 107 'For this Bel whom some call Saturn, was the father of Ninus, the first king of the Assyrians; that name was also later worshipped among the Assyrians and Africans. Hence god is called Bal in Punic'; 'Fuit enim hic Belus pater Nini, primus rex Assyriorum, quem quidam Saturnum appellant; quod nomen et

- apud Assyrios et apud Afros postea cultum est, unde et lingua Punica Bal deus dicitur', Isidore, *Etymologies* VIII.II.23.
- 108 For instance, *Langfæðgatal frá Nóa til várna konunga* gives his line of descent as follows: Núi, Jahpet, Japhans, Zechim, Ciprus, Celíus, Saturnus í Krít, Jupiter ... Óðinn ... etc., all the way down to Haraldr hárfagri (*AÍ III*, pp. 57–8). See also Heinz Klingenberg, 'Ódin und die Seinen', pp. 41–5.
- 109 Saturn: 'He also had such great skills in the art of prophecy that he knew beforehand things that had not yet happened'; 'Hann var ok svá mikill á þá íþrótt er fitónsandalist heitir at hann vissi fyrir óorðna hluti', *Prose Edda* W, p. 4. Óðinn: 'Óðinn had prophetic powers'; 'Óðinn hafði spádóm, *Prose Edda* W, p. 7, cf. *Ynglinga saga*: 'Óðinn knew that skill which is called seiðr, and because of that he was able to know things that had not yet happened'; 'Óðinn kunni þá íþrótt ... er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita ... óorðna hluti', *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 19.
- 110 'He also found that ore in the ground out of which he smelted gold'; 'Hann fann ok rauða þann í jörðu er hann blés af gull, *Prose Edda* W, p. 4.
- 111 The same term for governor, *stjórnari*, *Prose Edda* W, p. 5, is also used of the 'All-Father', whose existence primordial humankind had deduced by observing the regularity of the movements of the celestial bodies, *Prose Edda* W, p. 2. See also *Prologus*, p. 4.
- 112 'Hófsk önnur villa millum Krítarmanna ok Macedoniorum svá sem hin fyrri meðal Assiriorum ok Chaldeis af Zoroastre', *Prose Edda* W, p. 5.
- 113 *Prose Edda* W, p. 8.
- 114 The W prologue does not explicitly mention Saturn's conquests. However, the version of *Trójumanna saga* found in *Hauksbók*, which contains much of the same information on Saturn, is unequivocal on this point: 'Saturn now thought he was more powerful than any king, and it came to the point that he thought he ruled the entire world. He had also heard of hell, and he got hold of that as well as heaven'; 'Hugðisk hann [i.e. Saturnus] nú vera máttkari öllum konungum ok svá kom at hann hugðisk ráða mundu öllum heimi. Heyrt hafði hann ok getit Helvítis ok eignaði hann sér þat ok svá Himin', *Trójumanna saga*, pp. 1–2.
- 115 'Þann köllum vér Þór', *Prose Edda* W, p. 7.
- 116 See the discussion by Strerath-Bolz, 'Sprache und Religion in Prolog der *Snorra Edda*'.
- 117 'En til þess at heldr mætti frá segja eða í minni festa þá gáfu þeir nöfn með sjölfum sér', *Prose Edda* W, p. 2.
- 118 'God led them to Adam in order to see what he named them ... and Adam called all the animals by their names'; 'Adduxit [sc. Deus] ea ad Adam ut videret quid vocaret ea ... appellavitque Adam nominibus suis cuncta Animalia', Gen. 2:19–20, *Vulgata*.
- 119 These three names are obviously variations on the same name, but the prologue lists them as different names.
- 120 'Óðinn claimed that Priam was called Óðinn and his queen Frigg, and hence the land was later named and the place where the city stood, was called Frigg. Regardless of whether Óðinn said this in order to increase his own

honor or this was a result of the division of tongues, scholars have considered this correct'; '[Óðinn] kallaði Priamum hafa heitit Óðin, en dróttning hans Frigg ok af því tók ríkit síðan nafn ok kallaði[sk?] Frigia þar sem borgin stóð, ok hvárt er Óðinn sagði þat til metnaðar við sik eða þat hafi svá verit með skipti tungnanna, þá hafa þó margir frœðimenn haft þat fyrir sannenda sögn', *Prose Edda* W, p. 6.

- 121 All these examples are from *Prose Edda* W, p. 7. The name Frigiða appears to be derived from Phrygia, see Klingenberg, 'Odin und die Seinen', p. 57, and not from the Latin *frigida* 'cold, frigid'. Athra and Annan are identical with the feminine and masculine forms respectively in the accusative singular of ON ordinal *annarr*, 'second'.
- 122 'Those Asians brought the language with them North to this parts of the world, to Norway and Sweden, to Denmark and Saxony, and in England there are old names of lands and places from which one can understand that they are given in another language than this [Asian language]'; 'Þeir æsir hafa haft tunguna norðr hingat í heim, í Noreg ok Svíþjóð, í Danmörk ok Saxland, ok í Englandi eru forn landsheiti eða staða þau er skilja má at af annarri tungu eru gefin enn þessi', *Prose Edda* W, p. 9.
- 123 Strerath-Bolz, *Kontinuität statt Konfrontation*, pp. 66–8.
- 124 Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 1.9, cols. 165–92.
- 125 Tinkle, 'Saturn of the Several Faces'.
- 126 A classical formulation of this theme is found in Virgil's *Aeneid* 8.314–25, where one reads that the indigenous population of Latium had neither morals nor civilization and did not know how to plough. The text continues: 'Saturn came as the first from the high Olympia, banished from his stolen realm and fleeing the weapons of Jove. He ordered the wild people dispersed in high mountains and gave them laws ... thus he ruled peoples in gentle peace'; 'Primus ab aetherio uenit Saturnus Olympo | arma Iouis fugiens et regnis exsul adeptis. | is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis | composuit legesque dedit ... sic placida populos in pace regebat'. On the traditions of Saturn in classical antiquity, see Versnel, *Transition and Reversal*, pp. 136–46.
- 127 Saturn's Cretan rule does not figure prominently in the material surveyed in Tinkle, 'Saturn of the Several Faces'. She lists only Pierre Bersuire's early fourteenth-century *De formis figurisque deorum*, on p. 296, but the tradition is also found in the mythological treatise by the Third Vatican Mythographer, p. 153, as well as in Ælfric's Old English *De falsis deis*, p. 682.
- 128 On human sacrifice to Saturn, see Isidore's *Etymologies*, 8.33. Saturn's devouring his own children is commonly associated with his status as a god of agriculture and seasons, so e.g. by the Third Vatican Mythographer: 'Servius says he ate his sons for this reason only, that he himself is god of the seasons, which repeat themselves forever'; 'Dicit eum Servius ob hoc tantum filios comedisse, quod ipse est deus temporum, quae in se revolvuntur in aeternum', p. 156. Augustine discusses this in *De civitate Dei* 8.19. Classical and medieval sources commonly derive Saturn's name from *saturandus* 'the one who is to be sated'. This and other etymologies are listed by MacFarlane, 'Isidore of Seville on the Pagan Gods', p. 17.

- 129 'The error of idolatry arose from him, and as people made sacrifices to him he was called Baal, we call him Bel'; 'Af honum hófsk skurðgoðavilla ok sem hann var blótaðr var hann kallaðr Baal, þann kǫllum vér Bel', *Prose Edda* W, p. 3.
- 130 'Comestor: Idols originated from that same Ninus in this way: As Belus was dead, Binus made a statue of his father in order to console himself in his sorrow. He showed such great reverence for the statue that he would spare whatever culprit who took refuge to the statue'; 'Comestor. Ab eodem Nino orta sunt idola in hunc modum. Mortuo Belo Ninus in solatium doloris imaginem patris fecit sibi, cui tantum exhibebat reuerentiam, vt quibuslibet reis qui ad eam confugissent parceret. Proinde homines de regno eius diuinos honores imagini eius cæperunt impendere', Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, p. 37, 'The making of idols originated with this same Ninus in that way, that when his father Belus had died, he had a statue made of him in order to comfort himself in that great sorrow that his death and demise had brought upon him. He honored and revered the statue so much that he gave peace and good gifts to all those men who sought help and protection from the statue'; 'Af þessum sama Nino hófsk skurðgoðasmið með þeima hætti at svá sem faðir hans Belus var allr, lét han gera eptir honum eina líkneskju sér til hugganar eptir þann mikla harm sem hann fekk af hans andláti ok fráfalli, hverri er hann veitti svá mikla virðing ok vegsemd at hann gaf þeim ǫllum mǫnnum grið ok góðar gjafir sem sér sóttu þagat til hjálpa ok verndar', *Stjórn*, p. 102.
- 131 This part of *Stjórn*, in particular its section on Zoroaster and his connection with Ham and the origin of magic, pp. 101–3, is somewhat incoherent and confused. Comparison with Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*, p. 37, its Latin source, helps clear up some of the problems but not all of them.
- 132 An Old Norse translation of this work counts among the oldest preserved vernacular writings in Iceland. It is preserved in a number of manuscripts, the oldest (AM 674a 4to) from c. 1150–1200, according to *ONP*.
- 133 'En þar námu aðrir eptir ok gerðu líkneski eptir ástvinum sínum, eða eptir inum ríkustu konungum dauðum ok búðu lýðinum at blóta þá svá sem rúma-borgarmenn Romulum, kítarmenn Þór eða Óðin', *Elucidarius*, pp. 111–12.
- 134 *Hauksbók*, p. cii: 'det 13. og 14. årh.s interpolatorer viser sig sjælden som kritiske hoveder'.

Epilogue: Óðinn and Odysseus

- 1 The historicity of the accounts of Hákon's life has been discussed by Bagge, 'A Hero between Paganism and Christianity', Williams, 'Hákon Aðalsteins fóstir', and Kreutzer, 'Valhall – Himmel – Hölle', among others. *Heimskringla*'s vivid description of the sacrificial feast at Hlaðir has been the subject of an intensely source-critical study by Düwel, *Das Opferfest von Lade*, who concluded, p. 119, that the whole account is a reconstruction made 'in Analogie zu Blutriten des alttestamentlichen Judentums'. More constructive approaches are found in Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Hákon den gode og guderne', and Sundqvist, 'Snorri Sturluson as a Historian of Religions'.

- 2 See e.g. Hultgård, 'Ár – "gutes Jahr und Ernteglück"', p. 302. The extent to which notions of sacral kingship were current among ancient Scandinavians is heavily debated – as evidenced by *Reallexicon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, in which almost 150 pages are devoted to the entry 'Sakralkönigtum' – but most would agree with the conclusion that '[d]er Sakralcharakter der germ. Kg. ist ... wohl schon für die heidn. Epoche kaum zu bestreiten, ob die Herrscher aber auch Sakralkg. waren, das ist keinesfalls erwiesen', Erkens, 'Sakralkönigtum V. Ergebnisse § 24', p. 305.
- 3 So *Ynglinga saga*: 'People paid taxes to Óðinn throughout Svíþjóð ... and it was his duty to protect the land against hostilities and make sacrifices for their prosperity'; 'Um alla Svíþjóð guldu menn Óðni skatt ... en hann skyldi verja land þeira fyrir ófriði ok blóta þeim til árs', *Heimskringla* vol. 1, p. 21. Óðinn's successors, beginning with Njörðr and Freyr, follow his lead taking taxes and conducting sacrifices.
- 4 For a much fuller argument of this point, see Steinsland, *Den hellige kongen*, who argues that it was the continuity of sacral kingship over the period of Christianization that made possible the conversion to Christianity.
- 5 In various guises, it has even survived outside of academia down to our own time.
- 6 A biography of Guðmundur Andrésson was already included among the prefatory materials to the edition of his commented translation of *Völuspá*, published in 1673. His biography is treated most recently by Gísli Baldur Róbertsson, 'Höfuðdrættir úr brotakenndri ævi Guðmundar Andréssonar'. Guðmundur is also the main character of Þórarinn Eldjárn's historical novel *Brotahöfuð* of 1998, published in English translation as *The Blue Tower* in the following year.
- 7 Extant are letters from Guðmundur and Einar Arnfinnsson, a learned Icelandic acquaintance of his, to Ole Worm asking him to intercede on Guðmundur's behalf. See *Ole Worm's Correspondence*, pp. 175–88 and 137–8.
- 8 Reproduced by Faulkes in *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. II. See Lassen, 'The Early Scholarly Reception of *Völuspá*', on the early history of scholarship on *Völuspá*.
- 9 A modern edition of this dictionary has been published by Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson and Jakob Benediktsson.
- 10 Guðmundur Andrésson, *Lexicon islandicum*, svv. Balldur, Vaner, Rigur. The motivation for Guðmundur's identification of Heimdallr with Dionysus is a minor mystery. In his commentary on *Völuspá* st. 1, Guðmundur writes 'On Heimdallr, see above' ('De Heimdalo vide supra', *Philosophia antiquissima norvego-danica*, p. 2), but none of the previous (or subsequent) pages provides any detailed comments on Heimdallr.
- 11 'Loki (m.) is the name of one of the demigods in the Eddic mythology. He is the originator of cunning, slyness, and crimes. He is also called Lopte or Leipte from Lapithas the Centaur, the son of Phorbas: For this Lochus or Leipte is in the Edda called the son of the giant Farbauti. According to the Greek poets, other persons in the same lineage of centaurs were Lapitus and Laodocus, sprung from Apollo, it can be assumed that the names of Lochus are formed thence'; 'Loke

- | m.g. In Eddica Mythologia vocatur, Deunculorum unus, isque vafrićiei & astutiæ facinorumqve auctor, qvi & lopte vel leipte | à Lapitha Phorbantis filio Centauro: Nam hic Lochus vel leipte in Edda dicitur esse filius Farbauta jøtuns. In eadam porrò Centaurorum prosapia à Poëtis Græcis traduntur alter fuisse Lapitus & Laodocus, Apolline sati, ut vel hinc Nomina hujus Lochi finxisse, colligi possit', Guðmundur Andrérsson, *Lexicon islandicum*, p. 170.
- 12 However, he cautiously added: 'I make this one [the Erythraean Sibyl] our seeress, while I search more certain knowledge. Certainly, each will struggle for his own theory, although I have added mine'; 'Hanc nostram Volvam facimus, donec certiore venamur cognitionem. Verum sua cuique conitet sententia, qvamvis ego meam adjecerim conjecturam', Guðmundur Andrérsson, *Philosophia antiquissima norvego-danica*, p. 4 of the unpaginated preface.
- 13 Guðmundur Andrérsson, *Philosophia antiquissima norvego-danica*, p. 1. Guðmundur's text of *Völuspá* st. 1 differs somewhat from the text found in the most recent edition of the poem: 'Hljóðs bið ek allar | helgar kindir, | meiri ok minni | mögu Heimdallar; | vildu at ek, Valføðr, | vel fram telja | forn spjöll fira | þau er fremst um man', *Eddukvæði* vol. 1, p. 291.
- 14 Guðmundur's note on the lemma *helgar* begins as follows: 'Helgar. Helgur | Adject: per Syncopen, à voce Heilagur; dictum ita est, qvòd sacrum ac Sanctum, à voce Heid | id est res pretiosa, ut aurum & opes summi pretij; qvæ fuerunt Ethnicorum qvasi Dij. Unde Heidingar appellati sunt qvasi Mammonistae: Contra vero Gudingar & Gydingar | qvi verum Deum colebant, veluti Israelitæ & Judæi', *Lexicon islandicum*, p. 2.
- 15 *Two Versions of Snorra Edda* vol. 1, p. 31.
- 16 *Preface II* in Lbs I–IV 1199 4to, dated 1650–80? (<https://handrit.is>), presents the same basic ideas as NkS 1867 4to, although the text differs significantly in many instances from that of NkS 1867 4to.
- 17 'Obiter Hactenus interpretationem hujus carminis percurrere sategeram, ut verborum potestatem ac significata aliquo modo exprimerem, minus vero de Mythologica expositione sollicitus veluti quidam faciunt qvo ex qvovis Poetarum æno venantur Mysteria tum Physica, tum Ethica, si non Theognostica'; 'In passing, so far I had been fully preoccupied with expounding the interpretation of this poem, so that I in some way might express the meaning and significations of the words, but I have been less concerned with mythological exposition in the manner of those who hunt whichever cauldron of poets for now physical, now ethical, if not theognostic mysteries', Guðmundur Andrérsson, *Philosophia antiquissima norvego-danica*, p. 102.
- 18 Such as this one on Venus, Aphrodite, and Freyja: "Venus" also means "beautiful", thence *venustas*, "beauty", is derived. In Greek, she is called Aphrodite from *aphros*, *spuma*, "foam": "Sea-foam-goddess", as it were, because, as mentioned earlier, she had supposedly been brought forth by Saturn's genitals and the foam of the sea. Now one can see that the Æsir called such a goddess Freya [i.e. Freyja]. One can assume that the name is derived from this term for foam which the ancients also called *frófa* or *fróva*, which greatly resembles the name of Freya. Alternatively [the name may be derived] from Venus, the "v" having been changed to "f", as often happens, and "n" having been replaced

by “ey” causing her name to be Freya; ‘Venus þýðist og væn, þaðan kemur venustas “vænleiki”. En á grísku kallast hún Aphrodite, ab aphros, spuma “froða”: Haffroðudís sem sé, því að, sem fyrr er getið, þá átti hún að skapast af sköpum Saturni og froðu hafsins. Nú má sjá að Æsir kölluðu slíka gyðju Freyu [i.e. Freyju]. Má tilgeta það sé dregið af þessari froðuglósu, sem þeir gömlu kölluðu og so “frófu” eð “fróvu”, og er þá nærri komið Freyu nafni, eður af Venere að umbreyttu v í f sem oft verður, og burtteknu n en settu í staðinn ey, tildregið að hún Freya heiti’, NkS 1867 4to, 106r. Comparison with the text in Lbs 1199 1–IV 4 suggests that the somewhat faltering logic of parts of this passage may be at least partly due to scribal errors.

- 19 ‘Fyrst að hann er bestur, líknsamastur, blíðmáll og fátt var ljótt á Baldri, því kærleikurinn eður ást felur lýtin. Hann var og fagur álitum, so er samlyndi hreint. Þess annars að Höður hinn blindi, varð honum að meini með mistiltein, að ráðum Loka, það er, vinskapnum grandaði blind auðs ágirni með vopnum, sem með fyrstu voru ungviðir óvaxnir, það er, járníð var í jörðinni en ekki til sverðsmíðis brúkað, fyrr en Loki, það er lygar og rógur, sleit það upp og byrjaði að smíða vopn og verjur til að granda samlyndi manna á milli og góðum sáttum, og víst yrði Baldur úr helju heimtur, ef allir vildu trega hann og stunduðu til að ná vinskapnum aftur, en það fer ekki so, allra síst vill það gera gýgurin Þökk, ingratitude, því þeir sem mest gott eiga manni að þakka, níðast oftlega helst á hans lífi og æru’, NkS 1867 4to, 107v.
- 20 The five-book *Nostoi*, a part of the Epic Cycle, was devoted to this topic. Summaries of this lost work are provided by Proclus and (Pseudo-)Apollodorus. See, most recently, West, *The Epic Cycle*, pp. 244–87.
- 21 πτολίπορθος, Homer, *Odyssey* 8.3 and elsewhere.
- 22 Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 1011–16.
- 23 Malkin, *The Returns of Odysseus*, pp. 156–77. Reported by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *Antiquitates romanae* 1.72. Solmsen, ‘Aeneas Founded Rome with Odysseus’, pp. 95–100, provides additional examples of foundational myths in Italy linked with Odysseus.
- 24 Strabo, *Geographica*, 3.2.13.
- 25 The association of Asciburgium with Odysseus is probably explained by etymologizing the name (falsely) as fortification (Gr. πύργος) of the leather sack (Gr. ἄσκος) (cf. the sack containing the winds which Aeolus gave to Odysseus, see Tacitus, *Germania* ed. Lund, p. 121, and ed. Rives, pp. 125–6).
- 26 ‘Quae neque confirmare argumentis neque refellere in animo est: ex ingenio suo quisque demat vel addat fidem’, Tacitus, *Germania* 3.3.
- 27 Ramus, *Nori regnum*, p. 5.
- 28 *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. 11.
- 29 The third edition carries the slightly modified title: *Tractatus Historico-Geographicus, quo Ulyssem et Outinum unum eundemque esse ostenditur, et ex collatis inter se Odyssea Homeri & Edda Island. homerizante, Outini fraudes deteguntur, ac, detractâ larva in lucem protrahitur Ulysses*.
- 30 It was first published in 1680 and reached a wide readership. It was continually reprinted and read until the 1880s. On Ramus’s biography and publications, see Amundsen, ‘Jonas Ramus’.

- 31 If Ramus is remembered today, it is primarily in the role of husband of Anna Colbjørnsdatter, one of the few heroines of Norwegian history. On March 28, 1716, during the Great Northern War, a troop of 500 Swedish soldiers had arrived at Norderhov, where they demanded food, drink, and lodging. According to a widespread legend, Anna, the lady of the farm, complied, but cleverly served her visitors an abundance of food and drink that severely diminished their military proficiency. At one point she asks the Swedish colonel permission to send a maid to a neighboring farm after sugar. The colonel, whose sound judgment presumably was reduced at this point in time, grants her request. The maid then warns some Dano-Norwegian troops in the vicinity. They react immediately and take the inebriated Swedes by surprise. Even though the Dano-Norwegian forces were outnumbered three to one, the Swedes lost and many were killed or taken captive. See Eriksen, “‘Den Norderhougs mandige kvinde...’”.
- 32 ‘Jeg tviler ikke paa, at der jo gøres ansøgninger der om, om saa skulle hænde sig [i.e. that Torfæus dies], enten af Jonas Ramus eller saaden en, og vende de da op og ned paa tinget, og skrive noget wisswass, som confuderer semidoctos, og prostituerer væsenet hos de lærde’, *Arne Magnussons private brevveksling*, p. 373.
- 33 ‘mange kløgtige og sindrige, men dog lidet afgjørende Beviser søger at gjøre Ulyssem til Odin’, Suhm, *Om Odin*, p. 39. See Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, pp. 38–9.
- 34 Examples of this are Holm-Olsen, *Lys over norrøn kultur*, pp. 36–7, and Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, p. 35.
- 35 ‘libros ejus mihi nondum contigit inspicere’, Ramus, *Ulysses et Otinus*, p. 162. In the third edition of the work, Ramus made extensive revisions to this part of his text (which deals with the identification of Ogygia, the island of Calypso), and the reference to Rudbeck has been left out.
- 36 ‘Satis diu sub Outini nomine non soli Polyphemo, sed toti orbi arctoo imposuit Græcus ille Ulysses, qvi ex fraude & fallaciis totus [1702, totos 1716] fuit compositus, qvique non unus idemque semper & ubique fuit, sed sæpe aliud nomen, sæpe aliam sibi patriam fingendo, Protei instar & Vertumni alias atque alias visus est formas assumpsisse [assumpsisse 1702, 1716]. Jam itaque tandem detrahenda est impostori larva, sub qua per 29. ferè secula delituit incognitus. Proditur inter alia de Otino, quod in serpen|tem se transformaverit; verum enimvero e veteri ista serpentis cute, sub qua satis diu fallax & dolosus habitavit Otinus, jam tandem proserpere videbimus Ulysem’, Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 3–4 of the unnumbered *Prefatio ad lectorem*. Here and elsewhere the ‘Ausgabe letzter Hand’ is cited. Misprints are corrected using the edition of 1702 where possible (all three editions contain numerous misprints).
- 37 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 41–6.
- 38 ‘Οὐτις ἐμοί γ’ ὄνομα Οὔτιν δέ με κικλήσκουσι | μήτηρ ἡδὲ πατήρ ἡδ’ ἄλλοι πάντες ἐταῖροι’, Homer, *Odyssey* 9.366–7.
- 39 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 41.

- 40 'Patet itaque ex his quæ dicta sunt, Ulyssem in peregrinatione sua, ut incognitus pervaderet, Outin appellari voluisse: quod, cùm ille Græcè in obliquo casu exprimeret, nostri Græcæ lingvæ ignari etiam in recto casu Outin appellarunt. Quo nomine cum pleni apud nos sint omnes historiarum libri, uno ore clamitantes Outin quendam Otin vel Odin, qvem Latinè Otinum reddiderunt, ad nos olim ex Asia in septentrionem advenisse, utcunque quis ille fuerit, nobis hactenus sit incognitum, jam tandem itaque ex nomine virum agnoscimus, & ex ungue [1702, unge 1716] leonem æstimamus', Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 45–6).
- 41 He is also open to entertaining the idea that Homer himself misunderstood Odysseus' supposed nickname Οὐτις and assumed that it was something Odysseus made up in order to fool the Cyclops: 'Perhaps Homer, a Greek, when he heard that Odysseus called himself Outis [acc. *Outin*], ascribed it to the cunning of Odysseus, thinking that Odysseus had invented this name for himself in order to fool foreigners, whereas it actually was authentic and proper to him'; 'fortè Homerus, homo Græcus, cum inveniret Ulyssem se Outin appellasse, ad astutiam hominis hoc retulit, cogitans ad illudendos peregrinos Ulyssem id nominis sibi finxisse, cum tamen genuinum ipsi esset & proprium', Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 44.
- 42 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 89.
- 43 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 92–3.
- 44 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 92–6.
- 45 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 47.
- 46 Already in antiquity, Odysseus' travels were held by many to be entirely fictitious (a number of examples of this are given by Rives, *Religions in the Roman Empire*, pp. 124–5). Yet, the story continues to elicit new attempts at mapping Odysseus' route. Best known today is perhaps the (controversial) theory of the Italian nuclear engineer Felice Vinci, *Omeri nel Baltico* (3rd edn. 2008, and many translations), who traces Odysseus' journey to the northern part of the Atlantic and the Baltic Sea.
- 47 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 44 and 169.
- 48 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 87.
- 49 *Prologus*, p. 6; *Gylfaginning*, pp. 13 and 55; *Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1, pp. 5–6.
- 50 'Qvamvis enim Ulysses homo Græcus esset, tamen, cùm ex Asia adveniret, & cum celebrem in septentrione Trojanorum memoriam reperiret, & fortè Græcos contra ob eversam Trojam infames, maluit Asiaticum se & Trojanum profiteri, ut eò majorem sibi gratiam & favorem conciliaret', Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 49.
- 51 'Valde procul in sacrarum insularum recess', Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, p. 145; cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 1015–16.
- 52 Ramus, *Tractatus historico-geographicus*, pp. 145–6.

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